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AUSTRALIAN CLASSICS

THE ADVENTURES OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

A Penal Exile in Australia 1825-1844

Lloyd O'Neil

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

AUSTRALIA has long ago freed itself from the cloud of Botany Bay, and the ignominy of that first chapter of history is almost forgotten, even by those Colonial families who can trace their ancestry back to the Criminal Colonies of Tasmania and New South Wales.

Indeed, there are very scanty records of that early adventure, when men as famous as Wainwright (who poisoned his cousin because her ankles were too thick) left their country for their country's good. A convenient fire destroyed most of the records some years ago, and hundreds of Australians sighed with relief and consigned their sheep-stealing, murdering or revolutionary ancestors to the oblivion of a short memory. Now, the history of the colonies needs this particular exciting chapter to make it complete, for some great men went to New South Wales with shackles on their wrists. Some of them were architects and painters, writers and thinkers; grandfathers any but the snobbish would be proud to own.

The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh are therefore a rare and valuable record of an exciting aspect of colonization.

Since all such early records may come under the suspicion of the unbeliever, it is wise for us to explain the exact circumstances under which this manuscript has come into the limelight of print. It was sent to us by Mr. Charles H. Bertie, the well-known librarian of Sydney, New South Wales. Mr. Bertie explained to us that it had come into his hands from a man who had inherited it from his wife's father, in whose possession it had remained for thirty years. Mr. Bertie read the manuscript and was so sure of its importance that he had it typed and sent to us in England. We recognized its value and interest, but the archaic literary

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

style of the writer made us doubt whether the book would be acceptable to modern readers.

So the manuscript was rewritten, but with absolute fidelity to the original story. It has been translated from its archaic form without losing the vitality of the story or the intensity of the background. No incident of importance has been omitted and nothing added to the sense or colour of the original script.

Following the typescript came the original manuscript from Mr. Bertie, an aged foolscap book of undoubted antiquity. The book contained the story of Ralph Rashleigh, written patiently and well, in about a hundred and fifty thousand words.

Some pages of this precious and ragged original are reproduced in this book,¹ although their faint stains and yellowing edges are naturally lost in the process of reproduction.

The Author's name on the title page is given as Giacomo di Rosenberg, and, upon one or two plays in manuscript which were found with the Rashleigh manuscript, the name of Otto von Rosenberg appears. From this conjunction of names it would seem that both are variations of a pseudonym. There is also an introduction to the narrative which is as follows:—

'ADVERTISEMENT.'

The tale contained in the following pages, was compiled by the Editor as it fell from the lips of the person, who was at once the author, and in some sort the hero of the adventures therein related, chiefly with a view to dissipate the ennui, and vary the monotony, at times inseparable from the circumstances of a life in the bush of Australia.

¹ See the frontispiece, and plates facing pp. 34, 94, 196, 298.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

As, however, the truth of many of the leading incidents is known to the Editor personally, and that others have been vouched for by persons of undoubted veracity, it is now offered to the public, who, it is hoped, will receive it with the indulgence due to the rude, unadorned production of

‘A SQUATTER.’

31st December, 1845.

It has been impossible to identify the Squatter or the hero of the tale, although the events recorded have been verified and there are a hundred points which prove the narrative to be authentic. The name, Ralph Rashleigh, is admitted to have been an alias, and careful research into existing records suggest that it is actually an alias of an alias, since, while one of the characters who was in Newgate Prison with him has been authenticated, in an ensuing footnote, by an account of his trial in the Sessions Papers, there is no record of the trial of any man named Rashleigh for the crime recounted in the book. It would seem that every name, except those of public persons, which occurs in the narrative has been deliberately altered. The reason for this is, doubtless, that the book was written, and intended for publication, very soon after the events with which it deals had occurred, and when many of the people mentioned were alive. The Squatter's note is dated 31st December, 1845.

Errors in the book occasionally serve to confirm its reliability. As an instance, Sir John Jamison, a well-known resident of Regentville at the time, is referred to as the Chief Justice. Sir James was not Chief Justice, but almost certainly he would have been chairman of the local bench of magistrates, since he was the most conspicuous resident of

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

the neighbourhood of the Emu Plains Agricultural Establishment, at which Rashleigh was employed. Convicts had only gossip on which to found information, and it would be intelligible for the chief magistrate to be described among them as Chief Justice, if justice is assumed to refer to a justice of the peace, and not to a position paralleling that of the Lord Chief Justice.

The ship, the *Magnet*, in which Rashleigh was taken to Australia, has been authenticated; the places in which he was employed and in which he lived, and the conditions prevailing during his sojourn in them, are all correctly described.

This was no work of an inventor of tales, but the labour of love of the squatter who made this fair – this very fair – copy of the massed notes which he had written down as the tale ‘fell from the lips of the person, who was at once the author, and in some sort the hero of the adventures therein related, chiefly with a view to dissipate the ennui, and vary the monotony, at times inseparable from the circumstances of a life in the bush in Australia.’

The diary is acknowledged to be one of the highest forms of literature and the most interesting form of history. Now come the diaries and personal records of the New World, and on the heels of the records of Aloysius Horn comes this diary-classic from the Antipodes, authentic as to its origin and amazing for the picture it gives of the first dark chapter of the genesis of Australia.

INTRODUCTION

I AM, on the whole, after consideration, of opinion that this remarkable volume of memoirs may be accepted as authentic. It records the life of a criminal who was convicted at the London Sessions for the crime of burglary just one hundred years ago, and provides material for reflection to all who have an interest in the evolution of the penal code. It is a book which might be read with profit by those ultra-humanitarian persons who would remove almost entirely the punitive quality from the legal means which society adopts for the disciplining of its recalcitrant members.

There is a powerful, because vociferous, minority of citizens who would abandon the death penalty utterly, even for the crimes of murder, high treason, piracy and the causing of disaffection among His Majesty's forces. They are among the revolutionaries of law, and their activities must be restrained if the law of England is to remain the pattern of justice which it has been, and is still admitted to be, throughout the world.

This man, Ralph Rashleigh, had the advantage of a decent upbringing, but, out of weakness of character, adopted what seemed the easier life of crime at an early age. After one short term of imprisonment for uttering spurious coins, he began to practise bolder and more profitable crimes, though never adopting violence towards any person in effecting his depredations.

He was a mild-natured man, with no worse criminal instincts than those necessary to become a successful thief and burglar.

The crime for which he was finally tried was not a very desperate venture, consisting merely of feloniously entering a private house and robbing the butler's pantry of the silver

INTRODUCTION

which was stored there. Such, it would be thought in these days, was not a crime for which a man deserved to die by hanging, but this was the sentence first pronounced against Ralph Rashleigh.

The capital sentence was commuted to transportation for life, and something of what it meant of hardship and suffering is recounted in the pages of this stark narrative.

One hundred years ago, and less, sentences of this severity were passed as a matter of course upon all who committed crimes against property. The theft of a spoon, a handkerchief, any trifling object, was punishable by death, or transportation for periods of seven or more years. It was not until 1861 that to hang a man for theft was completely abolished, but most cases of theft had by then ceased to be capital offences. In that year a series of statutes consolidating and amending the criminal law was passed, though not without considerable opposition from responsible authorities. There must therefore be alive at this time many people during whose lifetime men were actually sentenced to death for petty thefts, and whose contemporaries of childhood were transported as juveniles for such crimes. The Sessions Papers of the period give many cases of boys of fifteen and sixteen who were sentenced to long terms of transportation for such petty thefts.

The system of penal transportation which was in operation at the time when the hero of this chronicle was sent out to New South Wales was a development of what had been in operation for centuries. The Barbados and the West Indies had long before the beginning of last century been used as working asylums for criminals and prisoners of war; and, with the discovery of Australia, it was intelligible, though never defensible, that labour should be supplied in this manner for the opening and clearing of the country. It

INTRODUCTION

may be recalled that Cromwell had no compunction about shipping Irish and other prisoners of war to Jamaica to help in the conquest of that fever-infested island; and that, further, he despatched thousands of Irish girls and women to become wives to his transportees.

The living conditions of pioneers in any new and untamed country must always be harsh and meagre, and while, in these softer times, we may shudder at the extremities of hardship and misery endured by the convicts described in this book, it must be kept in mind that their conditions were hardly more onerous than those of the free population.

Australia in the eighteen-twenties and eighteen-thirties was largely unexplored, and the white population were still severely taxed to win the bare means of existence from its soil. That the forced labour of the convict population was only made productive by the use of the lash and other harsh punishment was natural, but the position of a well-behaved man was not much worse than that of a seaman in the navy or a deck-hand on a clipper. Flogging had been for centuries a method of punishment in both the services, and the use of the belaying-pin on shipboard was regarded as not only normal but justifiable. We need not, therefore, fling ourselves into overmuch emotion over the sufferings of the convicts of New South Wales as they are recorded in this book.

The transportation of criminals under which Ralph Rashleigh served his sentence worked admirably on the whole. The men could serve their term, obtain their freedom, receive a grant of land, and establish themselves as farmers and squatters, to live a healthier and more useful life than ever they would have done in the homeland. On the other side of the sheet is the record of gangs of outlaws and bush-rangers, of whose practices this book contains a comprehen-

INTRODUCTION

sive survey. These men were rebels or criminals by nature; desperate as their story is, it is not worse than that of the wild men in any new country. To name but one instance, there have been, within the memory of the present generation, gangs of desperate gunmen in the United States of America whose activities matched in lawlessness those of the gangs of Australian bushrangers.

The evolution of a civilized society is a slow and painful process; the harshness of the laws under which it develops is seldom greater than is dictated by the needs of the community for its protection and peace. There is no just cause to feel shame that such experiences as are here recorded could befall Britishers. One may, perhaps, regard the disappearance of the transportation system, and all that it connoted of human suffering, with relief and satisfaction; but in an historical sense it can be said that the wisdom and justification of that system lay in the incontrovertible fact that it worked well.

BIRKENHEAD

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

CHAPTER I

RALPH RASHLEIGH was the son of London shopkeepers of decent rank, received a sound education, and at the end of his schooling he was articled to an established conveyancer in the vicinity of Chancery Lane. At the termination of the second year of his training it is known that, by virtue of a provision in his indentures whereby he was entitled to a small but sufficient allowance, he was able to leave his master's roof-tree and live in a lodging of his own.

He had been subject to the normal amount of discipline and surveillance until this freedom came to him, but there is no great evidence that he was harshly treated, or that he was greatly irked by this restraint. Indeed, very little is known of his early youth, and nothing at all about his character and attainments as a child. Record is meagre, indeed, of the years prior to his assumption of the alias of Ralph Rashleigh. It is known that after attaining the freedom of a personal lodging his chief concern, out of office hours, was to indulge himself in such pleasures as his slender means afforded. He was a weak, easy-going fellow, not positively vicious, but apt to pursue any reasonably safe course which would add to his means of living flashily as a man-about-town. His legitimate means being scanty, he was prevented from going to excess with his tavern companions and from exercising the more expensive pleasures. He was a man tasting and savouring fragments of dishes, the whole of which only could have satisfied his taste and hunger. His appetite for the lighter satisfaction of life was continually whetted, but never really satisfied.

There was among his acquaintance a young articled clerk, similarly circumstanced to himself, who seemed not to be under any monetary disability. Rashleigh came to

THE MEMOIRS OF

know that Hartop, as the man was named, had no private means, and he began to wonder at his ability to spend in a single night's drinking more than Rashleigh himself could afford to spend in a week. Evidently Hartop knew of some way to come by money, which was outside his friend's experience, and Rashleigh waited for an occasion to discover what the particular trick of Midas might be. The opportunity occurred one night when unrestrained drinking had reduced them both to the condition in which reserves vanish and confidences are carelessly exchanged. Rashleigh, as Hartop ordered another generous round of drinks, asked him bluntly how he managed to spend so much money on drink and pleasure.

'You are only an articled clerk, like myself, yet you seem to have ten times as much cash as I. How do you manage it?' he asked.

Then Hartop told him how simple it was. He was in touch with coiners of spurious sovereigns, who sold them to him at a reasonable rate, which left a considerable profit to the purchaser. There was, of course, a certain element of risk in changing and passing them, he explained, but that risk could be reduced very simply to a minimum. A single rule of action solved the whole problem. This was: never to have more than one spurious coin on one's person at any time, and, if possible, always to have a genuine sovereign with which to replace the counterfeit, should it be detected. The visions of comparative wealth which the prospect conjured up in Rashleigh's mind, made the risks and the criminality of the affair dwindle into insignificance, and he eagerly accepted Hartop's offer to supply him in a few days with twenty spurious sovereigns. He was the more blinded to the dangers of the course which he was so wholeheartedly ready to take up, by the immunity from them which his

friend had been fortunate enough to enjoy. Hartop related experiences of his own in disposing of the coins which made safety seem utterly assured, provided one followed the one golden rule.

For long the event seemed to prove that one could escape detection with the ease and impunity which Hartop claimed. Rashleigh discovered himself cunning and resourceful as a petty malefactor, and his success in the disposal of spurious sovereigns removed the spur which had hitherto kept him to his work. He abandoned his habits of punctuality and industry and became insufferably negligent and careless. The remonstrances and advice of his principal were ineffectual, and in a few months the exasperated conveyancer dismissed him and cancelled his articles. The success of his new, dishonest method of securing his needs and occasional luxuries made this apparent calamity appear as a relief to Rashleigh, who, however, was astute enough to realize that he must affect some legitimate occupation in order to allay suspicion. His work had developed him into a penman of surpassing capacity, both as to speed and beauty in the writing of legal documents, and he resolved to set himself up as a law scrivener. His regimen thereafter was to work as a free-lance for two or three hours a day, in his lodging, and to spend the rest of his time wherever in and around London he could count upon opportunities for disposing of his coins.

For some time his success and immunity continued, and when he ventured farther afield to fairs and races in the country, his prosperity increased. He discovered from experience that country people were easy victims, and he decided to abandon the golden rule of carrying only one counterfeit coin at a time. He went to Maidstone to attend the annual fair, was forced to submit to being searched when

THE MEMOIRS OF

a townsman made an outcry at receiving from him a spurious sovereign, and, a second counterfeit being found on his person, he was arrested and committed for trial upon a charge of uttering counterfeit coins. At the next Assizes he was found guilty and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour.

In the eighteen-twenties, although prison treatment was severe to harshness, its discipline did not include the banning of free speech between prisoners. Rashleigh was set to the tasks of picking oakum and beating hemp in the company of other criminals, many of whom were experts in crime. In their perverse vanity these old hands boasted of their achievements in the past, and detailed their plans for future *coups* when liberty should be theirs again. Rashleigh speedily became a humble and eager disciple, studying assiduously all that he could learn of the art and craft of crime. At the end of his term he was released, and walked out of prison a master-craftsman of his illegal trade, anxious to put to practical tests the theoretical knowledge which he had acquired.

His immediate plan of action had long been mature in his mind. An old cracksman had told him of a jeweller's shop in the city of Winchester which could be easily and profitably rifled, and the two had agreed to make the attempt together as soon as his informant was released. Confident of his capacity, Rashleigh decided to commit the robbery single-handed, without waiting for his associate, and on his release proceeded immediately to London, where he converted into cash such possessions as he had left there in store. He next went to an address given him by a fellow-prisoner and purchased a full equipment of burglar's tools. These he packed into a bag with a complete change of clothing, and without delay took coach to Winchester. There he put up at a small inn on the outskirts of the town, and after eating dinner,

found his way to the shop which he proposed to burgle. The directions and details given him by his informant proved correct, and having entered the shop and purchased a small trinket, he returned to the inn possessed of all the information he required for the completion of his plans. He supped early, paid his bill, and went to bed, leaving instructions with the landlord that he was to be called at two o'clock in the morning, at which hour a coach would be due to start for Portsmouth.

It was a sleety November night, utterly dark, as he walked through the empty ancient streets to recommence his criminal career. It was such a night as no sane person would venture out into unless compelled, and Rashleigh reached the shop without meeting a soul. He set to work swiftly, and with chisel, brace and bit and hacksaw, removed a panel of the protecting shutter. Cutting the glass and removing the wire grating presented no difficulty, and he was about to load himself with booty from the window, when the raucous voice of a watchman crying the hour gave him pause. He quickly pinned a sheet of dark brown paper over the panel opening, and hurried to concealment in an ancient dark archway a few doors from the jeweller's. The inclemency of the night favoured him. The watchman did his duty faithfully but swiftly, and observed nothing as he hastened by on his way back to the warm comfort of the watchhouse. As the sound of his retreating footsteps grew faint, Rashleigh returned to the shop, filled his bag, his pockets and his hat with gold, silver and gems, and replaced the paper screen to postpone discovery as long as possible. Thrilled with success, he made his cautious way to the wood which he had selected as a hiding-place on the previous day, and buried his booty carefully. He then set out to place as long a distance as possible between himself and Winchester by day-

THE MEMOIRS OF

break, by which time he found he had covered twenty-four miles. He breakfasted at a wayside public-house, after which he mounted a passing coach to Farnham and determined to stay a day or two in that town.

He took a room at a small inn there, and spent the hours of daylight sleeping away the fatigue of his night's work. In the evening he rose and went downstairs to the bar parlour, where he heard news of his recent depredation. A man had just arrived from Winchester, and was recounting to the assembled company the details of a most audacious robbery which had occurred in that city during the previous night. Rashleigh called for a drink and listened with unapparent interest. The man's story was that fifteen hundred pounds' worth of jewellery had been stolen from a Winchester shop, and that the whole city was in a ferment of excitement and conjecture. The local opinion was that the robbery had been committed by a gang of expert thieves. The magistrates had already examined all the loose and suspicious characters among the less fortunate residents, and had filled their day with a mort of arrests, searchings and questionings such as had not troubled Hampshire since, as the man put it, 'William Rufus, the king, was found dead of an arrow.' Finally the distracted magistrates, as eager to act as to talk, had arrested two harmless sailors begging their way to Portsmouth, and had sent the pair of them to jail for six months, because the only account of themselves which they could give was the truth itself.

Rashleigh heard the tale with relief touched with ironic amusement. No suspicion attached to him yet: that was clear and comforting. It was, however, too soon to attempt to remove his plunder from its hiding-place in the woods, yet he disliked the idea of going so far away as London. He therefore decided to visit some relatives who lived at South-

ampton, as if he were still employed as a lawyer's clerk, and was taking a holiday.

During his stay at Southampton an adventure befell Rashleigh which was, unknown to him, premonitory of a still more desperate one which was to occur to him in later years. He had taken advantage of a fine winter day to walk out to Netley Abbey, a noble pile of ruins in the New Forest, and, lingering later into the afternoon than was discreet, he lost his way back to town. It was dark before he hit upon a beaten path which appeared to run in the right direction, but, after walking along it for some distance, he discovered himself on the western bank of Southampton Water among ruins and rocks. Rashleigh had all a townsman's fear of darkness in open country, and his anxiety was not lessened by the recollection that he had heard his relatives speak of ruins on this part of the coast as being the haunt of deer-stealers, smugglers, and others living on the fringes of outlawry. It was therefore with considerable caution and a sense of uneasiness that he stumbled towards the only light which was visible in the November blackness. He had gone only a few yards when the light disappeared, to show again some minutes later. Half inclined to think that the light, which continued to show only spasmodically, must be the will-o'-the-wisp of which he had heard, he was on the point of abandoning its guidance, when he was startled to hear a voice, near yet below him, cry out:

'Bob! Bob! is it all right?'

Immediately the light shone again very close, and Rashleigh dropped silently to the grass-covered ground, quaking with fear. He saw that the light shone from a lantern in the hands of a tough-looking sailor whose murderous expression made it clear that the pistols stuck in his belt were rather for use than ornament.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Is Curtis in sight?' called the voice below.

'No, he ain't,' answered the lantern-bearer gruffly, walking forward and appearing to meet the ascending man behind a crumbling wall, which hid them from the view of the scared onlooker. The conversation between them made him crouch low and motionless.

'It's damned strange!' said the first speaker.

'Sure it is, an' I don't like the looks of it,' said Bob.

'It can't be for fear of the Hawks that he ain't turned up,' continued the other. 'They are all off the Wight on the look out for Jack Simmons. He sent a note to an old pard of his at Cowes a-purpose so it got into the hands of the preventive men. Wrote that he would try it on to-night at Blackgang or the Undercliff, and I heard as how the Southampton and Portsmouth cutters, with all the spare officers, have been sent over to the island.'

The men were obviously uneasy, and Rashleigh gathered from the snatches of the ensuing talk that they feared that they might have been sold by their spy in the preventive service. Then the conversation ended, and for some minutes Rashleigh lay wondering how he was ever going to get out of the fix he was in.

'By cripes, there she is!'

The excited exclamation was immediately followed by a loud, long whistle, obviously a prearranged signal. Instantly the quiet and stillness were broken by the sound of trampling horses all round the spot where Ralph lay hidden. Next the splash of oars told him that a boat was approaching. He raised his head to look, and saw three boats pull ashore. Numbers of men immediately surrounded them and unloaded their cargoes with frantic haste, using as few lights and making as little noise as possible. Swiftly the contraband was tied on the backs of the waiting horses, and placed

in two light wagons which had been brought down to shore when the signal had been given.

Suddenly another whistle sounded, and startled heads were raised among the smugglers as it was repeated at a little distance.

‘The Hawks!’

‘Blast them, they’re coming!’

Rashleigh heard the exclamation spoken in low vicious tones. The smugglers gathered into a group, apparently taking orders from their leader.

‘Jump now, you swine!’ he heard the man say. ‘Drive off them wagons and horses while we keep the bleeders back for a bit. Get away with the swag. Get!’

Wagons and horses disappeared at a gallop into the darkness, evidently taking some track which Rashleigh had failed to observe. The remaining smugglers dropped prone to earth, or sheltered behind rocks and ruined walls, as a strong patrol of the Coastguard advanced round a projecting point, visible because of the links¹ which they carried, throwing a wavering light over the scene, so that Rashleigh – now frantic with fear – could see the lugger off-shore crowding all her canvas to make a get-away. The Coastguard party fired a few shots after her, but made no attempt at pursuit, confining their efforts to the capture of the landed cargo. They came towards the place where the concealed smugglers lay, the lights they carried rendering them easy targets. As soon as they were within sure range, the flashes of twenty muskets stabbed the darkness. Two officers fell, and the remainder retreated quickly out of danger. They next attempted to outflank the enemy, and turned inland, only to find themselves exposed to a punishing volley from the snugly-concealed gang. The patrol returned the fire as best

¹ Torches.

THE MEMOIRS OF

they could, shooting more or less blindly at the spots where the musket flashes revealed the presence of the smugglers. In desperation the leader of the King's men, calling upon his followers, charged in among the smugglers, who, firing a final volley, leaped up and met the cutlasses of their attackers with clubbed guns. Chance alone saved Ralph from being trampled upon and shot while the mêlée went on all around where he lay shivering with fright. The opposing leaders met in personal combat only a few yards away, to be joined by their followers.

Sudden cheers mingled with curses and imprecations against the Hawks, broke from the inland wood as a reserve of smugglers came to the assistance of the gang.

At this the Coastguard seized their officers and insisted upon withdrawing from a now hopelessly unequal fray. Shots were exchanged as they retreated in good order along the beach, but the smugglers made no attempt at pursuit. Instead, they began hurriedly searching for their dead and wounded comrades. Lanterns were lit, and Ralph mastered his quaking limbs and lay shamming dead. A man held a lantern over him, and uttered a cry of surprise at finding someone who, by his dress, was obviously neither smuggler nor preventive man.

'Who in hell's this?' he cried. 'Here, Jack, here's a gunman. Let's run through his pockets, anyhow.'

The man addressed, a fierce-visaged, whiskered ruffian, came up and held the lantern close to Rashleigh's face.

'By the hokey! He ain't dead. He's either shamming or he's in a swoond.'

'Shake a leg there, you two,' came the leader's voice. 'We've got to get going – and quick. What you hanging about for?'

'Here's a bloke as pretended to be dead,' answered Jack. 'By his dress, reckon he's a spy.'

'A spy – hey?' said the leader. 'We'll put him from pretending death any more – ever. He shall swing from the Beaulieu Oak before the night's an hour older.'

What self-possession Rashleigh had managed to retain left him in a swirl of utter panic, but all his wild babblings for mercy were ignored. Seizing him by the arms, Jack and his companion hurried him along at a run between them. They were in the wake of the retreating gang and feared to lose contact, and consequently paid attention to nothing but the direction from which occasional guiding whistles came. At the end of the run, which Ralph guessed must have been three miles, they came to a halt in a forest clearing in the centre of which was an enormous and ancient oak.

The smugglers' leader, with two other men, stood at the foot of the tree, and immediately asked Rashleigh who he was. The unfortunate man answered in a voice stammering with terror by telling the simple truth, explaining how he came to be on the shore when the raid occurred.

'A damned fine tale!' replied the smuggler. 'You are a blasted spy, and you're going to die in a suitable way, at the bight of this good rope. You, Bill, count a hundred; and, Harry and Jack, you stand by ready to string this young shaver up when Bill's done.'

Confronted with the actual rope and the tree, and the menace of the callous leader's manner, Rashleigh was crazed with fear. In less than two minutes he had to face God, with a daring crime as his last significant achievement. For years he had forgotten God and all that august Name connoted, and at the blinding realization that he was about to meet his fate as a criminal, the fear of hell became real. He dropped on his knees before his contemptuous persecutor and begged

THE MEMOIRS OF

for pity, and swore by everything holy and unholy that he was no spy. Might he be struck dead if he had not spoken truth. . . .

He might have been speaking to one deaf and dumb for all the effect his pleadings had upon the smuggler. He came out of his agony of wild, plunging terror as he realized that the man called Bill was counting and had reached sixty-four.

'I'll give you everything I possess,' screamed Rashleigh. 'Only let me go.'

'Sixty-five, sixty-six . . .'

The smuggler caught up the rope and began to prepare the knot for the noose.

'Sixty-eight, sixty-nine . . .'

Until then only the grip of the two men on his arms had kept him from sinking in a collapse upon the ground, but the sight of the leader running the rope through the knot horrified him. Strong with despair he broke from his captors, snatched up a gun which stood against a tree, and dealt the chief so sound a blow on the head that the smuggler crashed sprawling to the ground and the gun broke off at the breech, leaving only the barrel in his hand. Before the others had recovered their wits, he leapt away across the clearing for the forest. The smuggler who pursued him was fleet of foot, and Rashleigh, glancing back, saw that he was gaining on him. He dodged round sharply, hoping to lay him out also with a surprise blow, but slipped and fell in a heap. His pursuer wrested the gun-barrel from him, struck him twice with it, and proceeded to drag him back to the tree of doom. He was no match for the smuggler, and could only struggle ineffectually while shouting for help. The second smuggler joined his confederate, and between them took him back to their chief, whose head, bleeding profusely, was being bound up by the man Jack.

RALPH RASHLEIGH

He greeted Rashleigh with a grim laugh.

'So ho, my shaver, you thought you'd settled me, eh?' he said. 'But Long Frank has got a tougher nut than you can crack. Now, lads, stop gaping. Chuck the end of the rope over that bough, and fix the noose round that bloody pup's neck. We'll choke him good and hearty.'

The men obeyed with alacrity. The noose, feeling cold and rough against his skin, was adjusted round his neck; three men laid hold of the loose end of the rope, and Rashleigh, struggling madly, felt the tautening, and then his feet left the ground.

'Ho! you blasted thieves, we've got you at last!'

Rashleigh heard the thunderous voice just as he raised his hands to clutch the rope round his neck, and next instant found himself miraculously in a heap on the grass. Picking himself up in a daze, he saw the three men who had been pulling on the rope, struggling in the grasp of a number of armed men, who speedily overpowered them. The smuggler chief and Jack had disappeared. All this Rashleigh realized in a flash, and was immediately surrounded by members of the crowd who had so opportunely arrived. He judged them from their dress to be gamekeepers, and found that his conjecture was right. They had been out in search of deer-stealers, when his cries for help had brought them to the spot at a run. Ralph told his tale and thanked them, and agreed to accompany them to Southampton, whither they proposed to escort the three captured smugglers.

Before the strangely assorted party had gone a mile, two decent-looking men came up and, taking the head gamekeeper to one side, talked earnestly with him. Presently Ralph was beckoned over to the little group, and asked by the new-comers whether he would agree not to charge the smugglers if a certain sum of money were paid him. The

THE MEMOIRS OF

gamekeeper, in whose view smuggling was a much milder crime than deer-stealing, raised no objection to freeing his prisoners; and Ralph was only too eager to agree to a course which would put money in his pocket and at the same time make it unnecessary for him to appear before a magistrate. So it was settled that he would forgive his persecutors on receipt of a sum of twenty pounds. The bargain was confirmed over a smoking breakfast in an alehouse on the border of the forest, Rashleigh receiving one-half of the agreed sum then, and arranging to call at the inn that evening to receive the balance. He then left the company to pursue their obvious intention of getting drunk together, and went home to his anxious relatives. In the evening he returned to the inn, received the balance of the money, and a few days later bade his relatives farewell and went to Portsmouth for a week.

It was now three weeks since he had robbed the Winchester jeweller, and he judged it safe to return to that city to spring his plant. He purchased a travelling trunk and went by coach to the scene of his first major crime. He unearthed his plunder and carried it safely to his inn in the evening, without any untoward incident troubling him. The following morning he arrived with his packed trunk in London and sought out a 'fence,' a receiver of stolen goods, who had been recommended to him by one of the old lags he had met in jail.

He presented himself at a dingy marine store in a court leading to the Minories, expecting to find in Mr. Jacobs the traditional type of Jewish old clothes merchant. Instead a man in the prime of life, well-clothed and with every sign of respectability, came into the shop at his summons, and on hearing Rashleigh speak the password, which he had

learnt in prison, made an appointment to call at his lodgings next morning to discuss the business.

Rashleigh prepared a list of the articles he had to sell, and had ready a few specimens when Jacobs arrived. The fence had a good reputation among his criminal customers, but Rashleigh was taking no chances. When the fence arrived he was kept in ignorance of the fact that the goods were in the house. He went carefully over the list and examined the specimens in a business-like way, and then turned to Rashleigh.

'Well, how much you want for the lot?' he asked.

'In round figures, a thousand pounds,' answered Rashleigh.

He smiled at the racial gesture of consternation with which the Jew greeted this announcement.

'A t'ousand pounds! Mein Gott, are you mad! Where you t'ink all that moneys shall come from?' demanded Jacobs.

'Come now, Mr. Jacobs,' said Rashleigh. 'You know that you could find twenty times that amount, if the goods were there. It's a bargain I'm offering you.'

'I tell you how it is, zen. Money is so scarce zese days, and besides, if I borrow ze money to pay for all zis junks, ven the devil do you t'ink I get it back? Tell me that.'

'Oh, well, if money is as scarce as all that, Mr. Jacobs,' answered Rashleigh, 'you can buy half of what is on the list. We can divide them into two heaps and toss up for first choice.'

Jacobs caught at this suggestion, and offered three hundred pounds for the fair half. Rashleigh countered by demanding three hundred and fifty.

'Not I,' retorted Jacobs finally. 'Shall I go?'

'If you won't give me what I want, you may as well go.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

The Jew went to the door and partly opened it, then suddenly returned to whisper confidentially in his customer's ear:

'I will give you six hundred and forty pounds for the lot.'

Rashleigh shook his head, and the Jew fairly ran out of the room and down the stairs.

A few minutes later he returned, as Rashleigh expected he would do, and concluded the bargain at six hundred and fifty pounds, paying down Bank of England notes on the spot, and taking the portmanteau and jewellery with him.

Happy in the consciousness that he had successfully completed his first big achievement in the new career which he had learnt in prison, Rashleigh settled down to enjoy the life of unimaginative dissipation for which he had traded his honour and his integrity. Theatres, gaming houses and women soon absorbed the money which such hard bargaining had won from Jacobs the Jew, and only months had passed before he found himself again practically penniless. Whilst he was questing round for some opportunity to renew his fortunes, he met by chance a girl who had been in the service of his old employer. In those early days he had had an affair with her under his employer's roof, and he found her ready to resume it. She told him that she was now in the service of an elderly gentleman of great wealth in Welbeck Street. Rashleigh saw his chance, and cultivated her liking for him with ardour, so that very soon he had gained admittance to her master's house, where he made love to her while acquainting himself with all the details he needed to know. His intention was to break into the house and steal the valuable silver, which, he learnt from his paramour, was kept in the butler's pantry. In a short time he had everything he needed for his plan of plundering the silver except an accomplice, and an accomplice was essential. It almost seemed as

RALPH RASHLEIGH

if fate were eager to give him all the assistance he needed for his schemes, for he met almost at once one of his one-time companions in prison, who had only recently been discharged and was penniless. He was ready for anything that would make him some money, and gladly agreed to Rashleigh's proposal. He also undertook to find, that night, a hackney coachman who could be relied upon to do what he was told and keep silent.

Rashleigh's plan being now complete, he decided to act at once. At midnight they went to the house, with the necessary housebreaking implements, and Rashleigh entered it by means of the circular coal-plate in the pavement, this being the only detail which had necessitated an associate. The other man replaced the coal-plate, and walked away, the understanding being that he should return in half an hour. In less than half the time he had allowed Rashleigh had removed all the plate from the pantry and had locked himself, with his spoil beside him, in the cellar. No hitch occurred. His confederate received the plate through the coal-hole, Rashleigh climbed out, the coal-plate was replaced, and the pair drove to a furnished room at Paddington which he had rented the day before.

Next day he went to a famous fence in Saint Mary Axe, and came away with two hundred pounds, which he shared with his accomplice.

CHAPTER II

IT was only a few weeks after the Welbeck Street burglary that Rashleigh's quick wits led him to undertake the crime which at once taxed his endurance to the limit and provided him with money to an amount which might have rendered it unnecessary for him to pursue the career into which his weakness had drifted him. It happened, as he was walking down Lombard Street on a Thursday, that he noticed that the great common sewer was open for repairs, and also that there was an important bank a few yards from the opening. On the instant he decided to rob the vaults, which, he guessed, would in the ordinary course be situated in the basement, and therefore probably accessible from the sewer. He entered the bank on the pretext of making an inquiry regarding the failure of some country bank, and was kept waiting for some minutes, owing to the number of customers who were there on business. This brief time he used to take in all that he could regarding the building. The narrowness of the frontage confirmed his belief that there was no space on the ground floor for a strong room, which, he concluded, must therefore be below stairs.

He determined to make his attempt to rob the place on Saturday, and made everything ready during the two days which followed his astute conjecture. Telling the people with whom he lodged that he was going into the country until Monday, he set out at about eight o'clock in the evening, with a carpet bag containing all the implements he would need, and a sufficient supply of food and spirits. This bag he concealed by wearing a long boat-cloak. On reaching the City he went into a coffee-room until it was well past eleven o'clock, when he paid his

reckoning and went by a circuitous route to Lombard Street, arriving there about midnight. It had come on to rain heavily, so that he met no one, not even a watchman, as he approached the opening of the sewer. He got into it and reached the bottom safely. He groped his way cautiously along the sewer, noting the side drains as he went, until he came to the one which, according to his calculations, should be the one beneath the bank. Supplying himself with a light by means of phosphorus and a wax taper, he crept along the branch drain, sounding its sides until a hollow noise suggested that he was outside one of the walls enclosing the bank basement.

He then proceeded to remove the bricks, stripping to the waist as the closeness of the drain, combined with the strain of working hard in so cramped a position, made him sweat profusely. Steadily and indefatigably he worked, prising out brick after brick, losing count of time. It was not for nothing that this section of the sewer was under repair, and two happenings warned him in time of the danger of the feat he was undertaking. First a crash startled him and he was almost choked with dust and powdered mortar. When this had settled he saw by taper-light that several yards of the crown and sides of the drain had collapsed, the debris completely blocking his way out. He went to work again, unalarmed by this, confident of being able to get out some other way, once he had got into the vaults. The incident had, however, made him cautious, and he proceeded more carefully, keeping a watchful eye on the wall on which he was working. It was thus that he noticed in time that the wall above the hole which he was making had begun to crack, and that, unless he took instant measures, it would soon fall and crush his life out. He crawled away rapidly to a sound part of the drain, and

THE MEMOIRS OF

had scarcely reached safety when the cracking wall caved in, bringing with it a large piece of the drain, which struck Rashleigh on the head and knocked him senseless.

When he came to his senses, he discovered with dismay that he was lying in a considerable depth of water. He groped and found his phosphorus bottle and his tapers, which luckily had not been buried, and, having lit a taper, he burrowed under the broken bricks until he recovered his bag, in which he found his spirit flask unbroken. A good pull at this revived him sufficiently to enable him to investigate the ruins of his many hours of work. He was elated to find that the collapsing walls had left a breach through which he saw that there was some kind of a cellar within. He cautiously enlarged the opening, gathered his tools into his bag, and entered. A brief examination of the place filled him with chagrin and despair. Packing cases, old hampers, broken bottles and piles of straw was all he found, and a strong smell of drugs. He realized, with an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, that he had actually entered the basement of the house next to the bank, which, he recollected, was occupied by a wholesale druggist.

He sat down fatigued and disheartened at the negation of all his labour and danger, and took another pull at the flask. The spirit put new heart into him, and he determined to try the other side of the drain so long as there was time safely to stay in the sewer. It was only six o'clock in the morning, and as it was Sunday, he had the whole day for uninterrupted working.

This time he worked with more circumspection, and after about two hours, by which time his hands were dreadfully galled and blistered, he had made an opening large enough to crawl through. A single glance in the light of his taper assured him that he had made no second mistake.

Investigation showed several cases of silver and copper money, and several small cases, which when he prised them open, he found to contain only blanks of bank-notes. Then he found a case of bill stamps, and he was beginning to think that his night of tormenting labour was to prove practically unrewarded, when he came upon a toughly made chest of antique design. It was strongly clasped and padlocked, and resisted all his attempts to open the lid. Sweating and breathless from his exertions, he sat down on the chest, his brain working desperately, furious at being balked when treasure was within an inch of his hands. He sprang up suddenly and heaved the chest over until it stood before him bottom up. He recollected having heard from an experienced thief in jail that a chest of this kind could often be opened at the bottom, if there had been any chance of damp collected under and round it, which causes the wood to rot. A careful examination proved that the bottom of the chest was indeed almost rotten, and in a few minutes he had broken it away. At what he found within all the toil and moil and danger were forgotten. Bags of coined gold, and a case of Bank of England notes, waiting there for him to take!

He emptied his carpet bag and stuffed it with as many sovereigns as he could carry, and then crammed in every bank-note that he could lay his hands on, until he judged that he had about ten thousand pounds. He then hid all his implements and went back to the adjoining house, where he made up a bed of straw in the most out-of-the-way corner that he could find. After eating a hearty meal of the food which he had brought with him, he lay down and slept.

He awoke at about six in the evening and decided to explore all the druggist's cellars with a view to discovering

THE MEMOIRS OF

whether there was some way out other than the choked-up drain. The idea of removing all that heap of bricks and rubbish was something he could scarcely bear to contemplate, rested though he was. After examining every inch of the cellar's floor-space, he came at last upon a grating in a corner, which, on being raised, proved to open into the main sewer. He returned to his straw couch and waited impatiently for twelve midnight to strike. All his anxiety to be gone did not overcome his caution, as at that hour the City was practically certain to be deserted on a Sunday night. Midnight came at last, and he got through the grating, carrying his bag of booty, and crept silently towards the opening of the sewer. Listening attentively, he waited until no sound of footsteps or anything else broke the silence of the sleeping City, and then clambered up into the street.

The night was as dark as it had been at Winchester, and rain was still falling steadily, but Rashleigh's elation at the favourable conditions was short-lived. As he made his way to the footpath, a watchman stepped suddenly out from a doorway and stood before him. Rashleigh was startled, but kept cool.

'Good night, watchman,' he said in his blandest tones.

'Good night, sir,' returned the watchman, a note of surprise in his voice. 'D'you know, I thought I saw you come out of that big hole!'

Rashleigh laughed with the man at the absurdity of the idea, and, breathing deeply with relief at avoiding another awkward contretemps, walked on.

No hackney coach being obtainable at that hour, he went down to the river to a house which he knew was kept open all night for the convenience of passengers arriving by the late packet boats, booked a room, and, being too excited to

sleep, spent the night alternately feasting his imagination on the future, and reading a book which he found in his bedroom.

In the morning he took boat up to Lambeth and breakfasted, going to his lodgings by hackney coach immediately after his meal. He concealed all his gold and notes except about one hundred pounds, and departed by coach for the City. Here by adroit questioning and listening, he learnt that the police were baffled by the crime, and had that morning arrested all the workmen employed in the repairing of the sewer, so that they could all be closely questioned. As a number of the workmen had not returned to work, there were some grounds for the suspicions of the authorities that the gang was concerned in the robbery. Placards offering a reward of five hundred pounds for the detection of the guilty parties were already posted outside the Guildhall. Rashleigh stayed that night at the 'Swan with Two Necks,' in Lad Lane, and next morning continued his inquiries. He, posing as a visitor from Bristol, chatted with a civic functionary at the Guildhall, from whom he learnt that the watchman who had accosted him on Sunday night in Lombard Street, had come forward and told his tale. In spite of the fact that the magistrates could make nothing of this information, Rashleigh was alarmed, and, content with what he had learned, took coach at once for his favourite retreat, at Farnham in Surrey. Here he decided to remain until it would be safe to return to his lodgings, pack his spoil and leave for foreign parts. He had heard that all the ports were being closely watched, and therefore he did not dare to make a precipitate flight.

About a fortnight later, he was sitting at breakfast in the inn, when he read in a newspaper that which made him leave his breakfast unfinished and leave immediately for

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

London. Essex Street, Strand, where he lodged, had been burnt down, one side of the street having been entirely gutted. Sick with apprehension, he took the first available coach, which landed him in the evening at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross. He raced up the Strand to Essex Street, and at a single glance he knew that complete loss had befallen him. Only the shell remained of the house in which he had lodged; it was a blackened ruin, and its walls were being demolished by an emergency gang of workmen, as they were in danger of falling.

Half demented with rage, Ralph Rashleigh went into a neighbouring tavern, and drank himself into a state of oblivion.

CHAPTER III

THE crushing effect of the shock of his heavy loss, combined with the strain upon his nervous system resulting from his debauch, was that Rashleigh developed severe brain fever. The landlord of the inn found him heavily intoxicated and put him to bed in one of his rooms, first taking his purse and deciding to apportion his charges according to its contents.

It was not until the fourth week of his illness that Rashleigh recovered consciousness, and it was some days before he was strong enough to take the air. On inquiring of the landlord for his money, he was presented with a bill which, with the surgeon's charges for visits and medicines, amounted to over eighty-eight pounds, and the man demanded discharge of this bill immediately. As he held the money, Rashleigh had no alternative but to settle the bill, extortionate as he knew the charges to be. All that remained to Rashleigh was the sum of seven pounds ten shillings and eightpence, and the suit of clothes in which he stood.

Wasted in health and strength, preyed upon by remorse and hopelessness, he determined to abandon his life of crime and take up again his occupation as a legal copyist. He left the inn for a small furnished apartment near the Temple, and after a week's recuperation, visited an old employer and asked for work. The lawyer received him in a friendly way and promised that he would have some work ready for him the next day, and Rashleigh made his way back to his lodging with an easier mind than he had had since he had first begun to utter spurious coins.

On his way home an incident occurred which made mock of his good resolutions and committed him to a terrible future. A man passing in the custody of a police

THE MEMOIRS OF

officer, on the way to the watch-house, hailed Rashleigh, who, on turning to look at him, discovered that it was his accomplice in the robbery of the house in Welbeck Street. Suspecting that Rashleigh was the pal of his prisoner, the officer passed the word to one of his colleagues, and in less than a quarter of an hour Rashleigh found himself arrested and lodged in the watch-house, ignorant of the charge upon which he had been arrested. After an anxious night in the cells, he was brought next day before the magistrate of Bow Street to hear the officer charge Thomas Jenkins (*alias* Thomas Jones, *alias* Thomas Smith, and a number of other *aliases*) with having been concerned in a daring robbery of a house in Adelphi. The police case against him was proved to the hilt. It appeared, however, that Jenkins had been seen in the company of an associate on the evening of the robbery, whom the police were prepared to swear greatly resembled Rashleigh. After Jenkins had been committed for trial at the Old Bailey, Rashleigh was put into the dock, but the only evidence which could be found against him was of a negative character. He stated with considerable heat that he was not a thief, but a legal copyist. It was decided to remand him for a week, so that inquiries could be made.

When he was again brought before the magistrate, he found that his associate in crime, Jenkins, had turned King's evidence against him and had made full confession of his story of the Welbeck Street crime, and had implicated the hackney coachman who had assisted in the removal of the booty, as well as the receiver who had bought it from them. Whatever defence Rashleigh might have been able to put up was destroyed by his inability to explain how he had occupied himself during the previous eighteen months. The police had made inquiries and found that his claims

RALPH RASHLEIGH

to be a copyist were based upon his visit to the lawyer whom he had mentioned on the day of his arrest, and the fact of his imprisonment for uttering spurious coins was put in. Rashleigh was therefore committed to Newgate to take his trial at the ensuing sessions for burglary, which at the time was a capital offence.

Strongly secured by leg-chains and handcuffs, Rashleigh was hustled into the prison van, with two prostitutes committed on the charge of pocket-picking; a girl, fresh from the country, who was committed to prison for having stolen a few articles from her mistress; an apprentice boy charged with robbing his master's till; an old beggar who was to be tried for a street assault; and, finally, a brutal-looking Irishman who had beaten his wife so severely that her life was despaired of. On the way to the prison the van was filled with the noise of the wailing of the servant-girl, the bawdy cross-chat of the two strumpets, and the wild curses of the Irishman, so that it was a relief to Rashleigh when at last the van stopped outside the prison gates. The van door was thrown open and its prisoners unloaded by torchlight; then Rashleigh and the others were hurried through the prison gates to the accompaniment of brutal jeers and jests from the mob which collected nightly to greet the arrival of prisoners.

A feeling of icy despair came over him as he heard the grating noise of the hinges and the rasp of the great bolts as the door was closed, shutting him off from the free world, as it seemed, for ever. All the prisoners were subjected to a strict search, but all their money and other innocent articles were immediately returned to them. A wardress led the women in one direction, and a turnkey ordered Rashleigh and the other men to follow him along a gloomy passage, the walls of which were festooned with

THE MEMOIRS OF

fetters and handcuffs, between which hung fire-arms of all sizes and dates. The sight of these added to Rashleigh's feeling of dread, but it was the instruments of punishment and torture, some of them then obsolete, which made the most terrifying impact upon his imagination. The passage ended in a small room in which a clerk entered the personal description of each of the criminals, after which they were moved on through a small yard until they were halted by a grated door. After some delay this was opened, and they were admitted into this new wing of the building and led up three flights of stone stairs into a large, badly-lighted apartment, the unglazed windows of which were strongly secured by iron bars. Except for a rough table and two or three wooden forms, the room was unfurnished, though scores of prisoners were sitting and lying around its floor. The turnkey handed his batch of prisoners over to the man in charge of the ward, who gave to each of them a chunk of black bread, a length of coco-nut matting, and a coarse horse-rug.

On the instant of the door closing upon the turnkey, a rug was flung over Rashleigh's head from behind, and he was pulled to the ground. The same treatment was meted out to all the new-comers, and all were stripped of their clothing by their fellow-prisoners. Rashleigh was too dispirited to resist, and when the laughing prisoners had had their way with him, he secured his rug and mat, spread them on the ground, and lay naked down to sleep. The combined distractions, however, of the vermin with which the place was overrun, the noisy talk and other nameless annoyances from the dregs of humanity who were now his associates, combined with the intense cold and the unease of his mind, made sleep quite impossible. He spent the night tossing and tumbling, brooding remorsefully upon the past, and making

golden resolutions for the future. Rising before the majority of his fellow-prisoners were stirring, he examined the pile of clothing which he saw lying in the middle of the floor, and finding his own clothes, dressed quickly and went to warm his frozen body by the fire. At eight o'clock several buckets of thin gruel, which served as breakfast, were brought in, but in spite of the poor quality of the food, Rashleigh made a hearty meal with the gruel and the black bread which had been given him the previous night. After breakfast the prisoners attended prayers in the chapel, and then those who were so inclined went to wash themselves at the pump. After this the order of the day seemed to be simply to stand around in the yard, talking and waiting for any messages or parcels which might be brought by friends.

Rashleigh stood among the disconsolate group of men who had hope of neither message nor parcel, and who could only look on in envy at the more fortunate prisoners. His interest was suddenly arrested by the appearance of a man who, in answer to the name of William Tyrrell,¹ went forward

¹ *On the seventh day of the Fifth Sessions at the Old Bailey in 1827, the trial of William Tyrrell took place. The Sessions Papers gives the following account: William Tyrrell was indicted for a fraud.*

Samuel Bills: I keep the Blue Posts public-house in Holborn and book for the Kentish Town coach. On the 17th of April the prisoner (who was a stranger to me) came to the office and produced a brown-paper parcel with this ticket to it (looking at it): the parcel was to be sent to Kentish Town; the ticket purports to be from the Angel, St. Clements, and charges 1s. 8d. carriage and 6d. portage. It was directed to Mr. Sheen, Kentish Town, he demanded 2s. 2d. which I paid him; he brought another parcel about three o'clock the same afternoon, and had a ticket with that, purporting to come from the Angel, and charging 2s. 2d. which I paid him, believing to be correct.

Cross-examined by Mr. Barry. Q. Did you know where they came from? A. No; the ticket only denotes that they came from the country; the parcels were found to contain nothing but brown paper.

THE MEMOIRS OF

through the door to the visitors' room. There was something about the man which made Rashleigh think that he had seen him before, and, on asking another prisoner who Tyrrell was, he learnt that he was a swindler undergoing a sentence of three months' imprisonment. While the inmates broke up into groups and gangs – 'schools' as they were termed – and settled down to various forms of gambling, Rashleigh watched the door through which Tyrrell must return. Without losing sight of the door for more than a few moments, he was able to observe that gaffing, or tossing-the-ha'penny, was the favourite form of gambling, which, despite the smallness of the unit stake, roused the players to a frenzy of excitement, and was carried on to the accompaniment of such an assortment of language as could only be heard in Billingsgate, Chequer Alley, and Winfield Street. Quarrels occurred and rings were formed in proper prize-fighting order, and the protagonists, cheered by their seconds, fought the issue to a knock-out. Betting was carried

James Phipps: I am a coachman. I took the parcel to Mr. Sheen, of Kentish Town, but it was a hoax.

Joseph Werrett: I took a parcel to Hampstead, but could not find the person it was directed to.

Joseph Walters: I am porter at the Angel, St. Clements, we often send parcels by the short stages and a ticket like these, with our charge.

Cross-examined by Mr. Barry. Q. Is this one of your tickets? A. We used these about two years ago; the prisoner was employed at the Angel about four years ago.

Samuel Hopson: I took the prisoner in charge; he said poverty drove him to it, and that he had a wife and three children; I believe he was in great distress.

Mr. Barry addressed the Court on behalf of the defendant and called several witnesses who gave him a good character.

Guilty.

Recommended to Mercy – Confined Three Months.

on over these battles, and he saw one man pledge his very shirt and shoes in support of his favourite. It astonished Rashleigh that men could keep so free-hearted and careless in such circumstances, when many of them knew that only a miracle could save them from the gallows in a few weeks' time.

At last Tyrrell reappeared, and as he passed him, Rashleigh recalled where it was that he had seen him. The occasion had been when Tyrrell was being taken in custody of a constable to Hertford Jail, and Rashleigh had entered the inn at which they were passing the night *en route*. He had sat in with the policeman and plied him so generously with liquor, that the fellow had fallen into a drunken sleep, whereupon Rashleigh had taken from his pocket the key of the room in which the prisoner was confined, and released him. He had further given him sufficient money with which to make good his flight. Rashleigh went over and talked with Tyrrell, who almost at once recognized him as the man who had so opportunely laid him under an obligation. He asked Rashleigh how he was fixed in prison, and on learning that he was practically penniless and without any influence or friends, Tyrrell at once showed that he was no ingrate. He explained that he had, by dexterous bribing of jail officers, obtained a place in one of the best and most luxurious rooms in the whole prison, where he had every facility for enjoying life; and that he had always all the money he needed. He promised to arrange it that Rashleigh should be removed into this desirable ward, and offered in any case to let him share his mess until the Sessions.

The principal turnkey of the jail came presently to the yard gate to superintend the distribution of the meat and soup to the prisoners, and Tyrrell seized the opportunity to ask the officer to allow Rashleigh to be transferred to what

THE MEMOIRS OF

was known as 'Smugglers' Ward.' The force of his appeal was driven home with a handsome bribe, surreptitiously pressed into the turnkey's hand, and Rashleigh received permission immediately to change his ward. It proved that Tyrrell had not exaggerated the comforts which were to be had in this notorious ward. The beds were all clean-looking, and a number of them were screened off separately with coarse curtains, thus dividing the main room into small private apartments, which were actually rented by the wardsmen weekly to those who could afford them. There were decent tables and chairs, and other furniture, and generally Rashleigh decided that there were worse places in which to hunt comfort than His Majesty's Jail.

Tyrrell gave him a share of his own two-bedded apartment, enclosed like the rest with curtains. It contained several shelves and a table with drawers, all loaded with articles of petty merchandise which gave it the appearance of a huckster's shop. A corner of the cubicle was actually used for the latter purpose, as Rashleigh discovered when, a few minutes after their arrival, several prisoners came to purchase tea, sugar, coffee, milk, eggs, bacon, butter, and other eatables, and the two of them were occupied for more than an hour supplying the customers. His benefactor then ordered a meal to be prepared for them, and Tyrrell noticing his guest's surprise, explained that 'Smugglers' Ward' kept its own hours and had its own regimen of existence independent of prison routine. It was true, he said, that all had to attend prayers in chapel every morning for half an hour with the ruck of prisoners, but they returned to their beds and remained snugly in them until the ward had been thoroughly cleaned out, their boots and clothes brushed, and their breakfasts cooked by their servants. Every one of the prison *haut ton* who could afford the luxury, employed a

RALPH RASHLEIGH

servant, while others less opulent clubbed their resources and shared the cost of a servant between them. These servants, Rashleigh discovered, were mostly the Johnny Raws, simple-minded countrymen, or young apprentices, who had not acquired sufficient guile to supply their wants, and were glad to earn a little cash and extra food by serving the more fortunate prisoners.

CHAPTER IV

ONCE Rashleigh and his ward-mates were locked up for the night, they spent the time much as they would have done in some favourite tavern, drinking, singing, gambling, and tale-telling. Porter was permitted by the regulations, but bribery and corruption made it easy to introduce into the ward all brands of wine and spirits, which, in such circumstances, were drunk to excess whenever the quantity was adequate. Over their liquor the hardened criminals related their exploits with the pride peculiar to their kind, and the beginners in crime were eager in their initiation, and longed for freedom principally to seek opportunities of equalling or excelling the feats of their hard-drinking preceptors. Raw shop-lads, awaiting trial for peculations from their masters' tills, sat at the feet of old offenders, and listened agog to the stories of the rich rewards which came from a career of plunder. Decent youngsters were in this fashion easily misguided into desiring a life of lucrative villainy, abandoning for ever in their minds any thought of returning to a law-abiding existence.

Day followed day, its programme unvarying. Attendance at prayers in the morning, hours spent in loitering purposelessly through the day, with songs, yarns and drinking in the evenings. The approach of the Sessions, however, steadied the inmates of Smugglers' Ward. There was much to be done. They had counsel to fee, attorneys to instruct, and defences to draw up. Rashleigh's acquaintance with the law made this occasion one of golden opportunities. He was engaged to write letters, prepare statements and plot the course of cross-examination of dangerous witnesses. He was well paid for these services, and was able not only to fee counsel for himself, but also

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

to fit himself out in decent clothes in which to attend the approaching trial. He was shrewd enough to realize, however, that his chances of acquittal were practically non-existent. Thomas Jenkins and the hackney coachman, who had been concerned with him in the robbery, had told stories which were corroborative and conclusive, and he realized that his hopes were further minimized by the fact that the Crown, in finding him guilty, would automatically prove their case against the very troublesome Jewish fence who had received and paid for the stolen plate. The police had for years been waiting for an opportunity to arrest this man, and the establishing of Rashleigh's guilt was all they needed now in order to seize the chance which his accidental arrest had put into their hands. Nevertheless, with the shadowy hope that mocks despair, he prepared his defence with all the skill he had, and waited for the opening of the Sessions, at which the destinies of four hundred unfortunates were to be determined.

The dreaded day came when the Sessions began, and Rashleigh watched with increasing amazement the light way in which the returning prisoners took their sentences. Scarcely a man showed any sign of regret, remorse or concern, as they came back from their ordeal by trial. Men who had received less than seven years' transportation were as gleeful as if they had been acquitted, and those who had been sentenced to a flogging, jested about the mere 'teasing' which they were to receive from the lash. Seven years' transportation he heard referred to, with a laugh, as a 'small fine of eighty-four months,' and even those sentenced for fourteen years, and for life, seemed to treat their doom as a jest. Looking on, it made him shudder to hear those who had received the death sentence comment upon

THE MEMOIRS OF

their fate as though it were some obscene and brutal joke to look forward to a hanging.

The day came when, by the calendar, Rashleigh knew that his turn had come. He turned sick with fear as he found, on examining the list, that several housebreakers were to be tried in sequence on the same day. He waited his turn in a frenzy of despair as, one after another, his comrades in crime came back, all doomed to death. He could not even pretend to join in the laugh which greeted the sally of one man, that 'They were celling them all, like bloody bullocks, to the knackers,' — meaning to the condemned cell. There had been a dangerous outbreak of burglary in London during the past winter, and it was obvious that the citizen jurors meant to put a stop to the crime by allowing no suspected offender to escape.

At last Rashleigh's turn came to stand in the dock, an amusing spectacle for the crowded spectators, who behaved with scanty consideration for the dignity of the Court. The lawyers made a show of examining their briefs, and the trial began.

Ralph Rashleigh was indicted by that name for having on a certain day and date, set forth in the arraignment, with force and arms feloniously broken into and entered the dwelling-house of Westley Shortland, Esq., in the night-time, and for having therein stolen, taken, and carried away, a large quantity of silver plate, his property, contrary to the statute and against the peace of Our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity; the indictment being interlarded with a vast number of other legal phrases. To this, of course, he pleaded 'Not guilty,' and put himself upon his trial. A jury was now empanelled, and the advocate for the prisoner having declined to challenge any of their number, the case proceeded. The learned

Counsel for the Crown, after an eloquent exordium, in which he dwelt at great length upon the many daring depredations recently committed under cover of the night upon the properties of the peaceful and well-disposed inhabitants of the town, proceeded to give a sketch of the case in question, as he had been informed it would be proved in evidence, and he wound up by reverting to the skilful and adroit manner in which the robbery had been perpetrated, at the same time charitably requesting the jurymen to dismiss all prejudices from their minds and try the case solely by the statement of the witnesses. Nevertheless, he gave it as his private opinion that the prisoner at the bar was a scoundrel of the deepest dye, steeped in crime to the very lips. The evidence of Mr. Shortland's butler was now taken; he swore that having obtained his master's permission to pay a visit to a sick friend for a day or two, he had collected the whole of the plate under his care and safely locked the articles in the pantry on the night in question. A female servant next deposed to finding the pantry locked up, but all its valuable contents missing, on the following morning, and the approver then completed the whole case by giving a clear and detailed story of the manner in which the prisoner and himself had actually committed the crime in question. His evidence was sustained by that of the hackney coachman, who had also been admitted to give testimony on the part of the Crown, and though Rashleigh's counsel most cunningly cross-questioned both these witnesses, and elicited from Jenkins in particular the admission that he had been a thief from his earliest youth, and of his having been actively engaged in the commission of every species of crime during a period of twenty-five years, yet the damning fact of the want of any regular or honest mode of livelihood on the part of Rashleigh rendered all efforts abortive, and after a brief pause the

jury, without retiring, found Ralph Rashleigh guilty of the crime of burglary.

The atmosphere of the court became suddenly tense with morbid expectancy: the dramatic moment had arrived. The Recorder addressed the prisoner in a silence broken only by his voice. Ralph did not hear the sentences preambuling the words of his doom. Only when the awful formula 'and hanged by the neck until you be dead' was spoken, did he realize that the sentence which he had dreaded had actually been passed upon him. A shiver ran through his frame, and then his consciousness seemed to be drugged. The court became unreal as a scene in a dream. Under the guidance of a warder he walked like a somnambulist from the dock, scarcely seeing the people on the crowded benches whose eyes preyed upon his misery. Still realization did not come as he meekly followed the warder down the gloomy passage from the Sessions Hall to the jail yard. He smiled foolishly at Tyrrell when the man asked him what luck he had had, and left it to the turnkey to provide the answer with the word 'Cells,' which he shouted to the officer waiting to receive prisoners sentenced to death. He smiled again at Tyrrell's words of encouragement as his ward-mate shook his hand, and the significance of the small packet which he found himself grasping at the end of the handshake entirely eluded his stunned intelligence. Scarcely knowing that he held the packet, he suffered the turnkey to hurry him along through yards and passages, until they reached the great ward where the condemned men were housed during the day.

It was still only the third day of the Sessions, yet there were over forty men, most of them young, already herded together under sentence of death by hanging. They greeted Rashleigh with loud cries of 'Fish, oh!' - 'One more in the net!' and asked him what particular crime had been his.

'Crack,' he replied, bewildered by the high spirits of his questioners.

'There's twenty-eight of us now,' said one, 'all juggled for housebreaking.'

'The scragman [hangman] will make a rare haul out of us,' cried another: a sally which was greeted with roars of laughter, as if to jest about their coming end was to touch the very apex of humour.

During the midday meal Rashleigh sat next one of his late companions in Smugglers' Ward, speculating upon the probable number of those condemned who would actually be hanged. It was well known that after each Sessions a certain proportion of the sentences were commuted to transportation, but so haphazard appeared to be the method by which the lucky ones were selected, that it was impossible to speculate who among them all would escape hanging. Tales were told of authentic cases in which hardened criminals with a long record of offences were allowed to escape and young thieves were hanged. These stories had the effect of still further depressing Rashleigh, whose anticipations were darkened by complete hopelessness.

He managed to keep despair at arm's length during the afternoon by joining in the gambling and singing in which the bolder and less imaginative spirits indulged, and keeping his eyes averted from the spectacle of the few miserable creatures who paced gloomily up and down the ward, muttering and groaning in fear.

At night the prisoners were broken up into threes and led to the dormitories in which they were to sleep during the short remainder of their lives. The cells were twelve feet by eight, containing three rude bedsteads, on each of which were two rugs and a straw mattress. It was already dusk, and as no artificial light was provided, Rashleigh and his two

cell-mates lay down to sleep in the falling darkness. It was only now that the awfulness of his position made its full impact upon his imagination, and he hid his head beneath his rugs as if to hide himself from the terrifying thoughts which whirled through his brain. In despair he began to consider suicide, thinking out one means after another, yet abandoning them as they occurred to him. Suicide was succeeded by the hope of escaping from the prison, and he revolved the problem in his mind as the peals of a neighbouring clock recurred hour after hour and found him sleepless. This reminder of time's passing brought more vividly before him the realization that his hours on earth were actually numbered, unless——. Hope leapt in his heart as he remembered that there was a chance — a good chance, he told himself fiercely — of being reprieved and transported. At last he began to sleep fitfully, only to be tormented with dreams more devastating to his peace than his waking terror. He dreamt of a funeral bell tolling for his execution; accompanied by the priest, he reached the scaffold, ascended to the platform, and saw below and around him the mocking faces of a sea of spectators; he felt the cold rough hempen rope touch his neck, felt the anguish of the eternal moment of the drop, and, as in his dream he struggled against strangulation, the pain was so intense that he awoke to find himself bathed in cold sweat and his limbs numbed. He lay crushed by the dread of the dream, fighting against the thoughts which assailed him, praying for the day to dawn.

As soon as he heard sounds of movement in the passage outside, he sprang from his pallet bed and paced the small floor until the turnkey came to lead him and his two companions in duress to the day ward. Light of day and the cheerful company of his fellows reassured him.

By the time the Sessions had ended there were altogether sixty-five men in the condemned side, all under sentence of death. At first the days passed in slow monotony and the nights in terror, akin to that of the first night, but gradually Rashleigh became mentally calloused to the anticipation of the dreaded prospect ahead of him, and began to plan seriously to escape. He discovered that his cell was on the outer wall of Newgate, and broached his scheme to his two night companions. One of them was too apathetic and miserable even to want to escape, but the second man was enthusiastic. The two of them, therefore, began operations that same night, with the two files which had been in the parcel which Tyrrell had pressed into Rashleigh's hand, and a piece of iron about two feet long which had once been the handle of a frying-pan. This was sharpish at one end and served as a chisel.

Choosing a place behind their beds, they began laboriously to scrape the mortar from the joints between the stonework of the wall, carefully collecting the dust into their pockets and throwing it among the ashes of the fire in the morning when they went into the day ward. In three nights they had loosened enough stonework for their purpose, but on removing the ashlar blocks, they were chagrined to find that there was a timber framing on the outside of the wall. They replaced the stones and made new plans to cope with this new difficulty. Next day they purloined two sharp table-knives, which they notched into the semblance of saws with their files, and sharpened the teeth as well as they could. Also they bribed a turnkey to procure them a phosphorus box and a piece of candle. On examining the partition next night, they found that it was simple weather-boarding such as is used to finish the gable ends of a roof.

That night they succeeded in their task of cutting away

THE MEMOIRS OF

a sufficiently large hole to enable them to crawl out. They found that the hole debouched under the apex of a roof abutting on to the prison, and there was nothing to prevent them climbing through on to the joists of the garret. Once there, they set about removing the tiles from the roof. Freedom already seemed to be theirs when, in his eagerness to reach up, Rashleigh's companion slipped from the joist and crashed through the lath and plaster of the ceiling of the room below. The next thing he knew was that he was sprawling on the bed of an old woman, who had instantly awakened and was shrieking 'Rape! Fire! Murder!' at the pitch of her voice, despite all the efforts of the man to pacify her and explain his intrusion.

Rashleigh, motionless as a rock, listened to this, and to the sound of hurrying footsteps which proved that the household had been aroused. Under cover of the noise, he crept over to the hole in the ceiling and peeped through. He saw the door burst open and half a dozen men and women, mostly in night attire, rush into the room. His companion, immediately the door was opened, bolted past his would-be captors and plunged down the stairs. Above the chatter of voices in the room beneath his feet, Rashleigh heard the sound of a struggle on the stairs, and judging from this that his friend had been captured, he thought it best to make his escape on to the roof. Nerved by despair, he tore away battens and tiles, and scrambled through the hole he had made. In his panic he missed his hold on the roof and began to roll at ever-increasing speed down the steep slope. His expectation of sudden and violent death when he should pitch over the roof edge to the ground below, was disappointed. The jerk which he was expecting occurred, but instead of dropping through space, he found himself gasping in icy water. He struck out to swim to the edge of this roof reservoir, and clutching the

parapet wall, climbed out on to it. The pitchy darkness prevented him from knowing how far from the ground he was, and also made any attempt at exploring the roof extremely perilous. There was nothing for it but to sit where he was astride the wall, and wait for dawn. During the hours through which he sat soaked to the skin and almost frozen, Rashleigh had leisure in which to regret ever having attempted to escape. Compared with his predicament the rough comfort of his prison seemed like luxury.

Light came at last, and Rashleigh saw at once that there was small chance of escape. He was on the top of a flat unbroken wall, and the flagged courtyard at its foot was over forty feet below his precarious perch. His only method of concealment was to jump back into the water, though even there he could be seen from the roof. He was just as securely imprisoned as he would have been in the strongest cell in Newgate. So hopeless was his position, that he began almost to hope that someone would see him, and this hope was realized so suddenly that he nearly pitched to the ground with the violence of the start he gave.

'Ha, my fine fellow!' cried a gruff voice, and gripping wildly at the wall, Rashleigh looked up and saw a turnkey holding a carbine to his shoulder, sitting at the foot of a chimney-stack. 'You're there, are you?' taunted the turnkey. 'Well, you're safe enough where you are; and we've got your pal, too.'

'Don't shoot me!' cried Rashleigh, alarmed at the sight of the unwavering barrel pointing towards him.

'You keep still and I won't,' rejoined the turnkey. 'But move an inch, and I'll topple you over full of lead.'

Someone now observed him from below. A ladder was brought and, descending it, Rashleigh was at once seized and hustled back to prison. After a week on bread and water

THE MEMOIRS OF

in a dark cell, he was heavily ironed and allowed to join his fellows in the day ward.

The ensuing days passed without incident until one afternoon during the fifth week after the Sessions the prisoners were taken early to their cells and the doors closed upon them. In a little while the sound of cell doors opening and closing, and the voice of the prison chaplain, warned the men that the critical hour had come at last.

Death or reprieve – which?

This question drummed in the mind of every man. Rashleigh stood, his breath coming quickly, until the cell door opened to admit the Sheriff in his official dress, and the chaplain in his robes. His breath caused a fluttering sensation in his throat as he listened to the Sheriff addressing one of his cell-mates.

‘William Roberts, your case has received His Majesty’s most gracious consideration, but your frequent previous convictions and the circumstances of peculiar atrocity with which your last crime was accompanied, utterly preclude the possibility of mercy being extended to so hardened a criminal. You must therefore prepare to expiate your offences on the scaffold. You are ordered for execution in fourteen days from the present.’

While the unhappy man struggled against completely breaking down before the irrevocable destruction of his last gleam of hope, the chaplain addressed him with a homily on the need for prayer and repentance, which the fellow seemed not to hear. Rashleigh, fear tightening his heart-strings, watched his rolling eyes and his ineffectual struggle to speak, with a fascination that had no sympathy in it: the dread of the moment for his own fate had stunned all feelings of altruism. He was not kept long in suspense.

The Sheriff addressed him and his remaining cell-mate

jointly, pompously announcing that, in the exercise of his Royal prerogative of mercy, His Majesty had graciously been pleased to spare their lives, but that to vindicate the insulted laws of his realm, they must prepare themselves to be transported for the remainder of their lives as criminal exiles in a distant land, and nevermore to set foot upon the soil of England.

Another homily from the chaplain, impressing upon the two prisoners the necessity of falling on their knees and giving thanks to God for sparing their most unworthy lives, was interrupted roughly by Rashleigh's companion.

'If ever I do pray to God,' he said fiercely, all his hate and defiance of society concentrated in his voice, 'it will only be to beg that I live to see you hanged, you prayer-mumbling, sanctimonious old swine, taking pleasure in hitting at poor b——s when they're down. Go to hell!'

The Sheriff failed to suppress a smile as he followed the angry cleric out of the cell.

CHAPTER V

‘LAGS away!’

This was the cry which, a few nights later, warned the transportees who had been respited that the time had come for them to be taken down to the hulk on the coast, in which they would be confined until the next convict ship was due to sail. Rashleigh and more than fifty other men were crowded into two large vans, handcuffed, heavily ironed, and chained together and to the van sides. As soon as all the prisoners were thus properly secured, the vans were driven off at a brisk pace towards an unknown destination. There were several of these convict hulks on the coast, and no hint was given to the prisoners as to which of them they were bound for. Rashleigh, however, recognized through the window familiar places and buildings, and knew that they were driving down the main Portsmouth Road. With the needful changing of horses, and by driving continuously, the vans reached the dockyard late on the following afternoon, and the prisoners were at once paraded on a wooden wharf, alongside which lay the gloomy hulk of the old *Leviathan*.

This vessel was an ancient '74 which, after a gallant career in carrying the flag of England over the wide oceans of the navigable world, had come at last to be used for the humiliating service of housing convicts awaiting transportation over those seas. She was stripped and denuded of all that makes for a ship's vanity. Two masts remained to serve as clothes-props, and on her deck stood a landward-conceived shed which seemed to deride the shreds of dignity which even a hulk retains.

The criminals were marched aboard, and paraded on the quarter-deck of the desecrated old hooker, mustered and

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

received by the captain. Their prison irons were then removed and handed over to the jail authorities, who departed as the convicts were taken to the forecastle. There every man was forced to strip and take a thorough bath, after which each was handed out an outfit consisting of coarse grey jacket, waistcoat and trousers, a round-crowned, broad-brimmed felt hat, and a pair of heavily nailed shoes. The hulk's barber then got to work shaving and cropping the polls of every mother's son, effecting in many cases such metamorphoses that Rashleigh was unable to recognize numbers of those who had come aboard with him. Before leaving the forecastle, each man was double ironed, and then taken on deck to receive a hammock, two blankets and a straw palliasse.

A guard marched the laden and fettered prisoners below decks, where they were greeted with roars of ironic welcome from the convicts already incarcerated there. The lower deck was divided up into divisions by means of iron palisading, with lamps hanging at regular intervals, and these divisions were subdivided by wooden partitions into a score or so of apartments, each of which housed from fifteen to twenty convicts. As Rashleigh and his companions were marched past the occupied pens, they were greeted by a chorus of the cry, 'New chums! new chums!' and howls of jeering laughter. In a few minutes all the new-comers were accommodated in their new quarters.

Rashleigh got little sleep that first night, being pestered by the silly tricks of the older hands, who delighted in tormenting the raw recruits. He managed to doze towards morning, and awoke to a consciousness of a most pungent and offensive smell. He glanced over the side of his hammock and saw that most of his pen-mates were up and gathered round a wooden tub – known as a 'kid' – into

THE MEMOIRS OF

which they were dipping spoons. As he realized that it was from the contents of this tub that the disgusting smell came, his messmates told him that this was breakfast and that he had best hurry if he wished to have any. He was hungry enough and obeyed the summons with haste. He filled a borrowed tin can with the foul-stenched mess, and took a spoonful. The taste made him splutter, being, if anything, more loathsome than its smell, and he gave up the idea of breakfast forthwith. The ingredients, he was told, were a very coarse barley, and the tough meat which was the convicts' allowance on alternate days, boiled together until it became the malodorous, tacky mess in the tub.

The dietary on the hulk, apart from this so-called soup, was a portion of cheese of the maximum indigestibility three days per week. On the days when meat was not allowed, breakfast and supper consisted of a pint of coarse barley plain-boiled in water, and in addition each man was given one pound of black bread, with a pint of sour vinegar mis-called table beer.

Work of some kind was provided for all the convicts, a certain number being detailed in cleaning the hulk, cooking, and as servants to the officers. The rest were sent each day to labour in the dockyard in gangs. Rashleigh, without any consideration for his fitness for the work, was placed in a timber gang, and found himself yoked with about twenty others to a large truck, each man being attached by a broad hempen band which was fixed over one shoulder and under the opposite arm. The foreman of each gang was a veteran sailor of the Royal Navy, who was apt to visit upon the convicts the same kind of tyranny as he had been subject to from his officers when he had been on shipboard, though his mercy could be purchased by the price of drinks, obtainable at the local taps.

RALPH RASHLEIGH

Rashleigh's ganger was a natural tyrant who delighted in the crippling and injuring of the men in his charge. They were all ignorant of the correct way of handling timber, and he would deliberately compel his gang to proceed so awkwardly that great baulks of timber would crash from the skids and smash a leg or an arm. These injured were carried off to the hospital, where their death or recovery depended upon the whim of the naval surgeon, whose coarse joke was 'that he was getting terribly out of practice, and the amputation of a few limbs was just the thing he needed to keep him from getting rusty.' While Rashleigh was attached to the hulk, scarcely a week passed without some poor devil giving the surgeon the practice he required.

Rashleigh, being unused to such heavy manual work, was at once treated as a skulker and malingerer, and so came in for a double share of oppression. Overstrained, bullied, and more than half starved, he came to look forward with a feeling of relief to the day when the ship should arrive that was to take him to New South Wales. There was small comfort in this, however, as a vessel had sailed a few days before his reaching the hulk, and another was not expected to leave for three months.

The terrible strain was too much for his constitution, and he fell ill, and being transferred to the hospital ship, he was prodigally treated with purgatives, bleedings and blisterings, until he was as near dead as a man well could be. The rest, however, despite the vigorous medicinal treatment, benefited him and he managed to survive by pouring into the urinal the medicines that were given him, and after some weeks graduated to the convalescent ward.

One day three patients died, and Rashleigh was one of the gang of convalescent convicts chosen to form the burial party, over on the Gosport side, in a graveyard known as

THE MEMOIRS OF

Rat's Castle. When the grave had been dug, the guard waved a signal, and the gang sat around among the unnamed mounds, which were the graves of convicts, awaiting the coming of the boat to take them back. Rashleigh fell into a mood of profound melancholy, when suddenly the idea of escape flashed through his mind. In a glance he took in the fact that the guard was some distance away with his back turned, that the boat had not yet left the side of the hospital ship, and that most of his fellow-convicts were asleep on the ground. Ten yards away were the ruins, affording a fine screen from observation, and beyond them the water. It might be done. The irons had been struck from one leg while he was ill, the chains being attached to one side only, so that there was a good chance that he could swim in spite of them, as the weather was warm. About a mile up the shore was a thicket of osiers in which he could conceal himself while endeavouring to remove his irons.

Not giving himself time to hesitate, he slipped across to the ruins, dodged through them, flung off what clothing he could, and slipped silently into the stream, swimming away softly. No sound of an alarm came, and he proceeded painfully but surely, swimming, wading and floating, until he reached the osiers, where he found a small creek, up which he swam until he came to a thickly-wooded spot. He scrambled ashore and sat down for awhile in hiding to recover his spent strength. Urged by the imperativeness of putting as wide a distance as possible quickly between him and the hated hulk, he set to work to try to wriggle himself out of his irons. It was painful, galling work, but owing to his emaciation he managed at last to slip the fetter from his raw and bleeding ankle.

He threw the fetter and his trousers into the deep water and swam across the river, making towards a pile of buildings

which he could just make out at a short distance in the gathering dusk. He found that they were cattle-sheds, but there was no house near; and in any case he was unwilling to encounter anybody in his state of complete nakedness. He decided to put in his night among the cattle. He made a deep pile of some litter, and burrowing his way into the centre of it for warmth, went to sleep until dawn. He was awakened by a boy coming to turn out the cattle. By the time he had thoroughly realized where he was, the lad had got some distance from the sheds. Rashleigh yelled to him, and the boy came up to him gaping with astonishment. Rashleigh told him the story that he was a poor sailor who, having got drunk the previous night and lain down by the water-side, had awakened to find himself stripped of all his clothes, and he begged the lad with great earnestness to find him some sort of clothes with which to cover himself until he could get to Portsmouth. The boy promised to do the best he could and set off for his master's house, returning in about an hour with a blue smock and checked shirt and a wagoner's hat and a pair of cord breeches and low shoes. They were all old and worn, but clean enough, and when Rashleigh had put them on, the boy told him that he could go up to the house, where he might get something to eat if he were hungry. Rashleigh thanked him and asked the way to the house, saying that he would go and wash himself in the river and follow when he was ready.

In a few minutes he had thoroughly cleansed himself and prepared to face life anew in the guise of a country bumpkin. Hungry as he was, he thought it might be indiscreet to take advantage of the hospitality suggested by the boy, as his main concern was to increase the distance between himself and the hulk. He therefore set off at a brisk pace along the

stream, but after going about a mile, he heard a woman's voice hailing him:

'Hi, Tummas, I zay!'

At first Rashleigh did not realize that the woman hailing him, but after walking on for awhile, he heard a voice close behind him roar out: 'Darn thee, Tummas! S I zay!'

At this he turned suddenly and found himself confronting a pretty country girl of about sixteen or seventeen years of age who was very much out of breath and for some moment stood, gaping with astonishment at finding herself with a stranger.

'Why,' she stammered, 'thee bain't Tummas, arter a'

'No, I am not Thomas, my pretty dear,' agreed Rashleigh, 'but I would be just as willing as he could possibly be to do anything to oblige you.'

The girl was staring intently at the clothes which Rashleigh was wearing.

'Drat it! This be so loike our Tummas's slop. W I could a'most ha' sworn to it by the patch on my back!'

'And very likely,' replied Rashleigh. 'It probably is your Thomas's slop, for it was given to me about a mile back by a boy after I had been robbed of all my clothes.'

'What! Robbed of your clo'es, all on 'em?' cried the girl, shocked. 'And did 'em leave thee quite naked?'

'They did so,' answered Rashleigh. 'And I have got a very long way to go without a penny to help myself.'

'Poor fellow!' said the country girl. 'If thee'd care to come back again a bit, mother'll give you zummat to eat, & thee looks as if thee'd be the better for that.'

Rashleigh decided that it was, after all, worth the risk, & he went with the girl to the cottage in which she lived with

her mother, who listened with sympathy to the story of his night of misadventure while she prepared a substantial breakfast of bread, bacon, and small beer.

As soon as he had done, Rashleigh pleaded his need of haste and set off at once in the direction of Winchester, and on Portsdown Heath he overtook a pedlar who was burdened with a heavy bundle in addition to his pack. Rashleigh, adopting a country dialect, fell in with the man, who, finding that their destinations were in a similar direction, offered Rashleigh a shilling if he would carry the bundle for him to the end of the day. Rashleigh, being penniless, was only too glad to avail himself of the offer, and accompanied the man until evening, when he received his shilling, and the two of them went into the village inn for a bite of supper.

None of the company took any notice of Rashleigh as he entered, and having eaten his bread and cheese, he sat quietly in a corner, slowly drinking his beer. He was on the point of dozing off, when suddenly the inn door was flung open and a file of soldiers marched in and guarded both doors. The sergeant in charge of them then walked round the room, intently examining every one in the bar. Rashleigh had taken off his hat, and his close-cropped hair immediately caught the sergeant's attention, and he asked Rashleigh his name.

'Thomas Harper,' he lied.

'What are you?'

'A labouring man.'

'Where do you come from?'

'Havant.'

'Oh, do you?' said the soldier. 'And when were you there last?'

'A week ago.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Humph! A week ago! And where have you been since?' pursued the sergeant remorselessly.

'Why, at Portsmouth, if you must know,' replied Rashleigh, who was beginning to lose his temper at the pertinacity of his questioner, who now drew his sword.

'Yes, at Portsmouth. That is true, anyhow. I know that, because you 'listed there.'

'Me, 'listed!' cried Ralph haughtily. 'No, indeed I did not, my good fellow.'

'Ha, ha! my country labourer!' said the sergeant with a laugh. 'Whoever heard of a countryman from Havant talk in a toney tongue like that!'

Rashleigh cursed himself for a fool for allowing his anger to overcome his discretion so that he spoke in his normal London accent.

'No, no, my fine shaver,' continued the sergeant, 'you never came from Havant; and now I have got you, I'll take good care you don't go there, neither.'

At this he gave a sign to two of his men, who seized Rashleigh and secured him with a pair of handcuffs, whereupon the whole party went outside the inn. They took possession of a hayloft and had supper brought to them, after which Rashleigh was secured to two of the soldiers by handcuffs, and the three of them lay together in the hay to sleep.

Rashleigh was more annoyed than perturbed at the predicament in which he had been placed, because he felt confident that the mistake of arresting him as a deserter must be discovered immediately he came up for examination.

They breakfasted at a very early hour the next morning, and immediately set off to march to Portsmouth. The sergeant walked alongside Rashleigh, and taunted him with his folly in trying to impose upon an old soldier by endeavouring to pass himself off as a countryman. Rashleigh

answered shortly that they would soon find out their mistake.

'Why, then,' jeered the sergeant, 'I suppose you are some king's son in disguise! Well, next time you desert from the Army, I would advise you to buy yourself a wig, for it was the cut of your hair that gave you away.'

Infuriated by this reminder of his stupidity in having removed his hat the previous night, and by the sergeant's sarcasm, he replied haughtily that he was no deserter and he had never enlisted in his life, and expressed the opinion that the life of a dog was better than that of a soldier, and for his own part he would rather turn a nightman than enlist. The sergeant flew into a rage at this insulting remark, and threatened to knock Rashleigh's teeth down his throat if he said another word, and for the remainder of the journey the guard joined the sergeant in baiting the prisoner.

They reached the 'lines' of Portsmouth in the evening, and Rashleigh was confined for the night in the guard-room. Next morning he was removed to Gosport Barracks, where, as he had predicted, it was quickly discovered that he was not the deserter in whose pursuit the party had been dispatched, and the sergeant received a sound rating for his stupidity in arresting the wrong man. He was immediately set at liberty, but he had the misfortune to encounter the sergeant as he was crossing the barrack square. Rashleigh was so elated at his escape, that he could not resist the chance of abusing the man roundly for the oppression which he had heaped upon him on the trip to Portsmouth. The sergeant saw the opportunity for avenging the insult to his dignity, roared for the guard, and gave Rashleigh in charge for abusing him while on duty. He was handcuffed and confined to the watch-house, and in the evening was brought before the Mayor of Portsmouth.

THE MEMOIRS OF

His concocted story of who he was and how he came to be dressed in the clothes of a country labourer, failed properly to convince either the mayor or the clerk of the Bench, who called the sergeant to state his case. The complaint lost nothing in its voluble telling, and concluded with a statement that the prisoner had threatened to kill the witness.

‘Upon my word,’ said the magistrate, glaring at Rashleigh, ‘a very pretty fellow to abuse the honourable profession of a soldier, who spends his life fighting for his King and country, while such rascallions as you skulk through that same country, looking for opportunities to rob their neighbour’s hen-roost. Come, what have you to say for yourself, you blackguard?’

Rashleigh’s reply was to the effect that the witness had greatly exaggerated his offence, that he had not threatened the man’s life, but had only reproached him for the harshness with which he had been treated while a prisoner under his charge.

Two or three of the sergeant’s comrades-in-arms thereupon stepped forward, offering to corroborate the accusations against the prisoner, but the Mayor, having intimated that he would not trouble them when the case was so obviously established, addressed Rashleigh.

‘Now, my fine fellow,’ he said sarcastically, ‘you thought to impose upon this court with your lying story. Well, this is the way we deal with such insufferable scamps as you – you can go to jail for a month as a rogue and vagabond who has failed to give a proper account of himself, by any manner of means. But I won’t give you that light sentence; I’ll remand you for a week as a suspicious character, and I have little doubt that before the week has passed we shall have the hue and cry after you for some villainous depredation. Take him away!’

As he was being taken from the Mayor's court, he saw one of the guards of the *Leviathan* standing by, probably waiting to report the escape of a convict. This man immediately walked up to Rashleigh and scrutinized him carefully, snatching off the wagoner's hat.

'Aha! my pretty-spoken gentleman!' he cried, recognizing him at once. 'So you're nabbed already, are you!'

In a few moments Rashleigh stood again before the Mayor, who heard with obvious delight the true identity of the fellow whom he had so shrewdly suspected. Knowing well how escaping convicts were dealt with on recapture, he was content to hand Rashleigh over to the hulk authorities for punishment. Strongly ironed and chained, he was now removed to the hulk with a pistol-barrel pressed against his temple, and was at once confined in a dungeon known as the Black Hole, situated in the ship's eyes below water-level, and left there solitary, except for the company of droves of rats, without food. The tedious hours wore horribly away, and in the utter darkness he only learnt that the day had dawned through the sound of tramping feet on deck as the convicts set off to work. It was some hours after this before his prison door was opened by the guard, who took him up to the quarter-deck. Here, impressive and terrifying in their full-dress uniforms, were assembled the captain, his mate, the surgeon, and other officers of the *Leviathan*. After a very brief trial, in which he could offer only the natural love of liberty as defence, he was sentenced to receive ten dozen lashes, in the presence of all the convicts, that same day.

He spent the day until sunset in the Black Hole, and was then led up to the quarter-deck, passing between the lines of convicts who had been paraded to witness his punishment. The formality of reading over his offence and sentence was quickly performed, and the convict was ordered to strip.

THE MEMOIRS OF

Naked, he was securely bound to the gratings which had been lashed to the bulwarks, and a powerful boatswain's mate stood ready with the lash.

Rashleigh had been warned by other victims of the lash that shrieking and writhing only added to the pain, so whilst he was being secured to the grating he had caught his shirt in his teeth like a gag, so that he could not so much as whisper.

The first dozen strokes from the knotted raw-hide lash were like jagged wire tearing furrows in his flesh, and the second dozen seemed like the filling of the furrows with molten lead, burning like fire into the raw flesh. These two sensations of intense and intolerable pain alternated until the first four dozen – each of which was laid on by a separate seaman with a fresh lash – had been applied, after which his whole body seemed numbed, and the feeling during the remaining six dozen was curiously as though his lacerated and bloody back was receiving heavy thuds from great clubs.

The flogging endured for longer than an hour, and when he was unbound he collapsed insensible on to the deck, whence he was borne to the hospital ship. Resuscitation was effected brutally, and he came to his senses screaming with the pain inflicted by the salt dressing which had immediately been applied to his unsightly back. The pain caused by this rudimentary treatment was infinitely worse than anything he had felt during the actual flogging, so that he was nigh driven out of his mind by the stabbing, gnawing horrors of the action of the salt upon his wounds. He cursed and roared under the treatment, which was repeated every day as each new dressing was applied, though it was the rough stripping of the old ones from the festering back that gave Rashleigh a never-fading memory of the torture of being flayed alive.

RALPH RASHLEIGH

Some tough qualities of constitution and spirit, however, brought him through his continuous ordeal, and after a month or so he was convalescent, recovering just in time to join a draft of convicts for New South Wales, by the good ship *Magnet*¹ of London, Captain James Boltrope.

¹ A vessel named *Magnet* conveyed despatches from Governor Darling and the Colonial Office for several years, at this period.

CHAPTER VI

WASHED, shaved, close-cropped, supplied with two new suits each, and newly double-ironed, the convicts selected for the draft were paraded aboard the *Leviathan* for examination by the surgeon-superintendent of the *Magnet*. The few sickly men were rejected and their places filled by robust transportees, and the approved men were marched aboard a large lighter and transferred to that vessel, swinging at anchor in Spithead. Despite the harshness of the conditions to which he knew that he was going, Rashleigh carried his heavy irons with a light heart, and watched the distance between the hulk and the lighter increase with a feeling of vast relief.

The prisoners were immediately taken between-decks to their sleeping-quarters, where each was given a numbered bed and a blanket, and left for the night.

The good ship *Magnet* was of about five hundred tons burthen. The greater part of the main deck was relegated to the use of the convicts, who numbered one hundred and fifty; and the deck was divided into two sections by a strong bulkhead, the smaller section being for the confinement of the thirty boy convicts who were aboard. The hatchways were secured with elm stanchions, in a stout framing of which all the exposed woodwork was covered closely with broad-headed nails, so that the structure was practically proof against being cut. In one of these hatchways, between the men's and the boys' prisons, were communicating doors, so small that only one man at a time could pass through them. A military sentry was posted, day and night, in the hatchway, to deal with any attempt at mutiny or other dangerous conduct.

The military guard consisted of two commissioned

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

officers, six N.C.O.'s, and forty private soldiers, some of whom were accompanied by their wives and families. The routine of the ship was arranged so that, during the voyage, the convicts were allowed the liberty of the deck from sunrise until sunset, under an armed guard of three soldiers posted at points of vantage which gave them full surveillance of the tough bunch of derelicts in their charge. A boatswain and six mates were selected by the surgeon-superintendent from among the convicts, and they were made responsible for the cleanliness and orderliness of their fellows. The convicts' food-ration was what was known in the transport service as 'Six upon Four,' six convicts sharing between them the rations normally allowed for four Royal Navy sailors. The food was mainly salt tack, and on alternate days a small portion of wine or lime-juice was issued. Water was the only item of diet which had to be carefully apportioned: the food, such as it was, was plentiful.

In addition to the surgeon's sanitary party selected from the prisoners, there were also chosen another boatswain, two cooks, and other servants, who formed monitors or leaders of the squads of eight into which for purposes of food supplies the convicts were divided.

During the few days when the ship lay to in Spithead before sailing, Rashleigh was tempted, by the sense of irrevocableness of his departure from England, to do as his comrades were mostly doing, and write to let his connexions know of his fate. His better instincts overcame this sentimental urging, and he determined to fade out of their knowledge, lost to them for ever in his degradation, under his assumed name. Bumboats, carrying all manner of supplies, hovered daily round the *Magnet*, and Rashleigh's slender store of money was soon expended on modest supplies of tea, sugar, and other trifling comforts for the long voyage.

THE MEMOIRS OF

Although he was, in a sense, glad to be leaving England, he was affected strongly by the good fortune of some of the men whose mothers, wives, sweethearts and children came on board to take farewell of their men folk. His own friendlessness, contrasted with this affection, sorrow-ridden as it was, made him feel more than ever a pariah, one who had been driven out of the herd, absolutely, for ever. He was glad when the period of waiting was over, to see the anchor weighed, the sails unfurled and bellying to the breeze, and to feel the slight motion of the ship as she slipped jauntily between the mainland and the Isle of Wight.

As night fell on the English Channel, the convicts were ordered below to the sleeping-berths, between decks. These were framed of deal boards, supported by stanchions and quarterings, and subdivided in compartments, each sleeping six men in very close proximity. These sleeping-berths were framed in rows along each side of the ship, with a double row between them separated by narrow passages.

Rashleigh, being a good sailor, enjoyed what amusement could be got from the conduct of those who were unused to the motion of the ship. Many of them had never been to sea, and the vertiginous motion of the vessel caused by the broken sea of the Channel, filled them not only with nausea but with terror. Soon after being shut below, the sea freshened, and at first there was much confusion among the closely-packed prisoners. Those who were not too terrified to do other than lie in the immobility of fear, filled the night with a contrasting chorus of oaths and prayers. Gradually, however, a semblance of quietude came, and Rashleigh went to sleep, but as he was lying athwart the ship and she started rolling, his rest was continually broken by the violent motion. The increasing seas at last made sleep impossible, and he sat up for greater comfort, listening with awe to the crash of the

waves against the bows, and feeling the shiver that ran through the ship at each thudding impact.

Suddenly the *Magnet* hit a really big sea with a crash that made Rashleigh instinctively shrink back. There was a scattered noise of timbers falling overhead, as a great wave broke over the ship and poured a volume of water down the main hatchway, carrying the sentry violently against the bulkhead, and filling the prisoners' berths feet deep. Over a hundred sleepers awakened in the unfamiliar surroundings, to find their beds awash with sea water, let loose a pandemonium of terrified cries. The water, as the ship rolled, half drowned first one row of men and then the other. The cry went up that the ship was sinking, and panic took possession of the convicts. Rashleigh looked on in a state of terror, knowing there was nothing to be done; even when a few of the bolder spirits rushed at the small doorway in the hope of breaking through and gaining the deck, he made no move to join them. Their efforts to break through the wicket were in any case unavailing. An officer came with the assurance that there was no danger, leaving the prisoners to pass the remainder of the night comforted by the news that the big crash had been caused by one of the yards giving way. As most of the convicts knew of no yard except a measure, they were none the wiser for this explanation. Next morning the pumps were got to work and everything made ship-shape.

Fair weather favoured the *Magnet* thereafter, and the Equator was reached without any incident occurring to interrupt the strict routine on shipboard. There was a good deal of fun in the ceremony of 'Crossing the Line,' about fifty of the prisoners being ducked and shaved in tribute to Father Neptune. Rashleigh, because of his clerkly education and capacity, had been selected by the surgeon-super-

THE MEMOIRS OF

intendent to act as his clerk, a position which provided him with many comforts, and happened also to prevent him being implicated in a daring scheme which was set afoot for the seizing of the vessel.

The boys' prison was separated from the sleeping-quarters of the military only by a bulkhead, as it was from the senior convicts' quarters on the opposite side. Some of the irrepressible young thieves had succeeded in loosening a board in the bulkhead, giving them access to the soldiers' quarters. It became known to the men that one of the smallest-built lads made a practice of slipping through the narrow space and stealing tea, sugar, tobacco, biscuits, and anything else he could lay hands on; and some of the wilder spirits saw in this a chance to carry out a plot for successful mutiny. They persuaded the boy that he should, on a chosen night, steal three muskets which, he said, stood in a rack in the soldiers' berth, and which were supposed to be kept continually loaded. The plot was that, the muskets thus secured, they should be passed through into the men's prison, and in the morning when the convicts were let up to wash the deck, some of those who were up first should go to the forehatch and receive the stolen muskets from those in the prison below. During the proceeding the other men on deck were to be very active in throwing water and generally bustling to and fro to attract the attention of the three sentries — one at the forecastle, one at the waist, and the third on the poop — of whom only the last would be armed. The two sentries forward were to be surprised, seized and thrown overboard, while at the same signal, the one on the poop was to be shot dead. A party would then cut loose the breeching of a loaded cannon on the deck, and run it to the companion ladder leading to the soldiers' quarters. Simultaneously another party was to rush aft and secure the officers.

The day came, and to the point of seizing the forward sentries and the covering of the sentry on the poop, everything went according to plan, after which everything went to pieces. The stolen muskets proved to be unprimed; the sentry on the poop gave the call to arms, fired his piece at random, and was immediately thrown overboard. The fastenings of the cannon were too tough for the crude implements which the convicts possessed, and they were unable to cut it loose, no one having a knife.

By this time the soldiers were pouring up the companion ladder, only to be knocked backwards by the clubbed muskets in the hands of the now desperate prisoners. Two commissioned officers clambered through the cabin skylight, gained the poop, and shot out-of-hand two of the boldest among the convicts. This sudden turn in affairs cowed the others, who fell back, giving the soldiers the opportunity to gain the deck. Instantly a volley of musketry poured into the ranks of the prisoners, of whom five fell dead, three jumped overboard, and the rest were driven below by the pricking bayonets of the infuriated guard. The whole of that day they spent without food below, and on the following morning they were mustered early on deck.

All ranks of the military were under arms, one line being formed across the poop and another across the forecastle, while a gun had been lashed in front of each, beside which stood a seaman with lighted match. Both muzzles were trained upon the main hatchway where the convicts huddled in a cowering group, thoroughly abashed by the formidable precautions against any renewed attempt at mutiny. The ship's boatswain called each convict by name, and as each answered, he was ordered up to the quarter-deck on which the ship's and military officers were assembled in all the impressiveness of full uniform. The only one of the three

THE MEMOIRS OF

sentries who had escaped death on the previous day, was called upon to scrutinize each man as he came forward, with a view to identifying those who had been on deck during the attempted seizure; and each prisoner was stripped. If no wound showed, and the sentry failed to identify the man as a participant in the mutiny, he was interrogated as to his knowledge of the details of the plot and to the identity of the ring-leaders responsible for the outbreak, the promised reward for accurate information being immediate benefits for the rest of the voyage, and a strong recommendation from the senior officer and the ship's master for his liberty on landing at Port Jackson.

Rashleigh, being an inveterate and well-known liar who was never on deck in the morning until driven there by compulsion, combined with the fact that his position of clerk to the surgeon made it unlikely that the leaders of the mutiny would have confided their plans to him, was dismissed as innocent of complicity. In the end about twenty prisoners were specifically identified and, after a severe public flogging, were heavily ironed and confined in a den under the fore-castle for the remainder of the voyage. No amount of questioning produced any reliable information as to who the leaders had been, and the inquiry closed on the assumption that they were the men who had been shot dead, and those who had jumped overboard at the failure of the attempted seizure.

The normal routine, varied only by the posting of five sentries on deck instead of three, was resumed, and no untoward incident occurred until a few days after the *Magnet* had passed the island of St. Peter and St. Paul. One day a sail was reported standing on a course which would bring her close across the *Magnet's* course. She was a long, low schooner with raking masts, and in the captain's phrase,

'she loomed very suspicious altogether'; but as she veered on to another course when almost within hail and made away, no further interest was taken in her that day. In the dense haze of the following morning, however, she suddenly appeared close to the *Magnet*, and almost at the moment she was seen by the lookout-man, the sullen roar of a heavy gun boomed across the morning quiet. Before the reverberations of the report had ceased, someone hailed the convict ship in a foreign tongue. Captain Boltrope replied at once:

'An English convict ship bound from Portsmouth to New South Wales.'

The excitement promised by the gun's fire had roused even Rashleigh from his bed, and he came up on deck at a run. There he saw the schooner lying with flapping sails, head to wind, and the officers of the *Magnet*, including the military, gathered on the poop. From the answering hail from the schooner, it was patent that she was a foreigner whose officers knew no English, and immediate confirmation of the conjecture came with the running up of the gaudy flag of Portugal on the stranger's gaff, simultaneously with the firing of another gun.

'By hell, that gun was shotted!' roared the mate, looking aloft as if following the flight of the ball.

'Then, Captain,' said the senior Army officer, 'it's about time we got busy.'

'Aye, aye, sir,' answered Boltrope eagerly; 'we'll soon test the stuff she's made of. Hoist away the Union Jack, there! Mr. Trairs, jump below and hand up cartridges and wads. Surgeon, will you turn out all your men from below to help load, and run the guns in and out. You at the helm, there,' he roared, 'bring the starboard side to bear. By the Lord, you can have all the fighting you want, my pup of a Portugee!'

THE MEMOIRS OF

Amid the excited bustle which ensued, Dr. Dullmure, a Scottish Presbyterian chaplain who was on board, approached Captain Boltrope.

'Do you mean to fight, then, Captain?' he asked in a terrified voice.

'Do I mean to fight?' cried the seasoned sea-dog. 'Do I mean . . . ? Well, that's a good 'un. Aye, and fight like hell. Do you suppose I'm going to stand by and see my ship plundered, and that glorious bit of bunting overhead insulted by a damned Portugee? No, no; Jimmy Boltrope, with forty soldiers and that mob of tough 'uns – English, and fighters, every one of them – to back him, is ready to fight your devil himself, though he rise from the ocean with seven heads and seventy horns, like your beast in the Revelations. Now, stand back out of the way.'

The parson retreated below before this torrent of bellicose oratory, and the poop was cleared for action. The captain was in great glee and roared with laughter at the spectacle of the clumsy soldiers struggling up to the fighting tops to which they had been detailed. Meanwhile a boat had been lowered from the schooner, apparently full of armed men, and made towards the *Magnet*. As it approached, however, the sight of the military guard at their various posts put consternation into the voice of the boat's commander.

'*Prisonniers! prisonniers!*' he shouted back to his ship, and immediately ordered the boat to be put about.

He and his crew clambered quickly aboard, the boat was raised, and the schooner stood away without any further warlike action, and made its escape, much to the secret disappointment of every one, except the chaplain, on board the convict ship.

After the excitement of the mutiny and the encounter with

RALPH RASHLEIGH

the Portuguese, the eventlessness of the remainder of the voyage gave a new dreariness to life aboard, and there was not a man who did not thrill with anticipation, when one evening the hail of 'Land ho!' from the masthead heralded the end of the sea journey.

CHAPTER VII

IN the early hours of the morning the lights of Port Jackson were seen pricking the darkness, and as day dawned the *Magnet* entered the Heads – the two bold precipitous rocks which guard the entrance of one of the finest harbours in the world. A pilot had come aboard and took charge during the last lap of seven miles from the entrance to the site of the embryo town of Sydney.

Rashleigh stood on deck watching the land in which he was to live for the rest of his life appear on the horizon; and at this first gaze he found it forbidding, without charm or beauty. Sandy bays fringed by stunted trees, opened far inland between harsh, rocky headlands, with dense forests of gloomy green covering the background. It appeared as a primeval, uncultivated region, bare of any evidences of the softer, tamer results of the work of man for which he and his comrades longed. Even the Golden Island, to which someone called his attention, added to his sense of disillusion, for it appeared in the grey dawnlight as a sterile tract of rugged grey rocks, covered at the top with trees of dull green in which was no beauty. The *Magnet* rounded the last promontory, and came into view of the embattled fort at the entrance to Sydney Cove, and the straggling row of cottages which stretched along the high ground. This was a part of the town of Sydney known as the Rocks. Shortly afterwards the vessel came to anchor at a point, opposite a neck of land, from which the whole town was visible. It was an unpretentious specimen of civilization in the raw. Narrow, straggling streets lined with one-story houses scarcely more than large huts, with half a dozen decent residences, and a few miserable cottages appearing through the trees of the north shore of the harbour. Such was the town of Sydney

then. There was not a patch of cultivated land to be seen from the ship, even thus close inshore.

The day following their arrival, the Colonial Secretary, the Chief Superintendent of Convicts, and other officials, came on board to deal with the newly-arrived contingent of prisoners. Each man was called into the cabin and full particulars taken of their names, ages, religions, birthplaces, trades, and so on, all of which were entered in a register, with a minute description of each man. When this ceremony was concluded, the officials departed, and a more general class of visitors were allowed on board, some just curious for news of the old country, some to greet expected relatives, and some to inquire whether there were men who practised trades in which labour was required. Among the last was an elderly gentleman who was seeking a suitable assistant for his teaching academy, to whom Rashleigh was recommended by the surgeon-superintendent, in whose cabin he was then actually at work. He was called out and presented to the schoolmaster, who, satisfying himself as to Rashleigh's capacity, departed without any definite decision being come to.

For two weeks the prisoners kicked their heels in the confinement of the *Magnet* before they were paraded preparatory to going ashore. A new suit of clothing was handed out to each man, and they were broken up into divisions and rowed ashore to a spot near Fort Macquarie, whence they were marched through the Domain to the Prisoners' Barracks, and, after a formal parade, were dismissed. Numbers of the older prisoners now joined the new chums, bargaining for clothes, trinkets, and other small property, and many of the new-comers found themselves dexterously robbed before bed-time, by men whose criminal agility had not been lessened by punishment.

THE MEMOIRS OF

Four days after his arrival at barracks, only Rashleigh and two others remained of the one hundred and forty who had reached the colony with him. Those who were masters of trades had been 'assigned' to various masters in need of workmen, and such as had no special training or aptitude were sent to the interior, to be employed upon timber-felling and agriculture. Rashleigh was eventually assigned to the schoolmaster, and in a few days discovered that his billet was in the nature of a sinecure. His employer made no real demands for industry upon either his assistant or the scholars of his so-called classical and commercial academy, and was apt on any excuse to leave Rashleigh in sole charge, whilst he indulged himself in whatever amusement was to be had in the town.

The improvement in his environment and the conditions of his life had the effect upon Rashleigh of making his consciousness of being a life-convict dwindle. He was now respectably clad, and had all the liberty he wanted out of school hours, and quickly drifted back into the kind of leisured existence he had pursued when Hartop had helped him on to the criminal road. He made the acquaintance of other educated convicts, mostly employed in Government offices, who had formed the habit of meeting in the evenings in a kind of convivial political club. They debated affairs of State with easy condemnation of the powers that were, and the view that the welfare of the colony was shamefully neglected by Government was universally held, and inspired most of the speeches. The extremeness of the views expressed resulted eventually in their meetings becoming of interest to the Sydney police. Rashleigh was one evening riding the full flood of his impassioned eloquence upon the delinquencies of the Government, and roundly condemning the harshness of Governor Darling's rule, when half a dozen

constables in charge of a police officer joined his audience.

The officer took the names, addresses and other particulars of every one present, paying special attention to the man whose indiscreet speech had been cut short in the middle by the police intervention. No steps beyond this examination were taken that night, but the implicit warning was not lost upon Rashleigh, who abandoned frothgathering with the embryonic political agitators forthwith. This meant cutting himself away from the only congenial society that was available, for the lower class of the population of the town were of so degraded a type that the solitude of his own companionship was preferable to their company. The small class to which Rashleigh temporarily belonged was sandwiched between two main sections of the community, one comprising high Government officials and the few large merchants – the then aristocracy of Australia – and the lower social dregs of the convicts, or, as they were officially known, prisoners of the Crown. Many of these had served their sentences, and had established themselves successfully in business of various descriptions, amassing wealth which they mostly used for the indulgence of the weaker appetites of the criminal type. Many of these men had made their fortunes by trading in rum and tobacco with the convict population, and their business morality was as loose as could be, stopping only at practices which would put them back to their former convict status. So Rashleigh was lonely, being denied the company of any women of decent rank by his position as a convict; and he was too fastidious to purchase the use and company of such frailer members of the sex as were open to sell themselves and their companionship for a consideration. The pretty ladies of Sydney in those days were the very dregs of their outlawed class, wallowing in indescribable sloughs

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

of debasement and debauchery, preying upon the desires of debased and despairing men.

Rashleigh's period as a respectably living being, to all intents and purposes in the enjoyment of his freedom, came to a drastic close about a month after the police had interrupted his speech to the political malcontents. One day a constable came to the school with an order signed by the Chief Superintendent of Convicts, that one Ralph Rashleigh should accompany the bearer to Hyde Park Barracks. On reaching the barracks, he was placed in strict and solitary confinement, and before sunrise next day he was handcuffed and dispatched with a messenger-guard to a Government agricultural establishment at Emu Plains,¹ about thirty-five miles inland. He was not permitted to visit the school to obtain his belongings, the messenger proving impervious to entreaties and bribes. He was compelled to take the long tramp as he was, in a thin suit, and a light pair of shoes, which were in tatters long before he reached Parramatta, the end of his first day's stage. Next day he was obliged to walk the remaining twenty miles barefooted over the roughest roads, so that his feet were cut and bleeding before he reached his destination.

¹ This agricultural establishment employed at various times between 70 and 140 convicts. In an official return dated April 1, 1827, the number is given as 134; another dated February 16, 1829, as 6 overseers, 10 mechanics and 49 labourers.

CHAPTER VIII

AT Penrith they crossed the noble sweep of the Nepean River in a punt, and came in view of the far-flung expanses of Emu Plains. Rashleigh was by this time in too extreme a condition of physical wretchedness to be conscious of anything but fatigue and pain, scarcely raising his head to look whither his lacerated feet were carrying him. If he could only find rest in any sort of shelter he would be content to let the scenery be as bleak as a desert, and to forget that there need ever be a morrow to this day of anguish. Half bemused by his sufferings, he roused himself a little when the messenger announced that they were approaching the camp to which he was being sent. Looking up, he saw about thirty huts of various sizes, built of timber framing and bark walls, erected on both sides of the road. They gave an impression of utter comfortlessness and desolation, and as he stood waiting to be received, he noticed that the huts had been built with green timber, which had shrunk with time, leaving great chinks between the slabs. The shutters over the unglazed windows had also shrunk so that wind and rain had easy and numerous inlets.

The camp constable, a tall, stout, limping countryman, took over Rashleigh from the messenger, removed his handcuffs and led him to the residence of the Superintendent of Emu Plains – Government House as it was then called. He was halted in the doorway, while the camp constable went to inform the official of his arrival. In a few minutes he was before the Superintendent, and an attendant constable was motioning him to remove his hat. Rashleigh had heard this official described as one of the terrors of the whole convict colony, and he studied his appearance while waiting for the man to look up from the letter which he was reading. He

THE MEMOIRS OF

was above middle height, and of a very dark complexion, with brows drawn together in a gloomy frown; and when he spoke his tone was as harsh as his features.

‘So, my fine fellow,’ he growled, ‘you are inclined to politics, are you! Well, we’ll see whether we can’t find you something more profitable to think of here. You are sent to this establishment to learn field labour, and on no account to be employed in any other way for two years. When that time has expired you will be assigned to a settler. Take him away, Row, and send the principal overseer to me when the gangs come in.’

On getting back to the camp buildings, the constable turned to Rashleigh with a sneer.

‘As you be one of them dommed quill-drivers, I do suppose you’d best be put along of the rest, so you’ll rest in the Playhouse yonder.’

He indicated a straggling mass of buildings, similar to those already described, and into this Rashleigh limped, rejoicing that at last a chance to rest had come. The great hut was empty, so he flung himself down upon a rude bench, made of a split log set upon two stumps in the earthen floor. Wind whistled through the gaps between the shrunken timbers, and puddles filled the hollows in the dirt floor. Except for a table of the same rough design and workmanship as that on which he lay, two large iron pots and several tin utensils, there was no furniture to give a semblance of comfort to the place.

Rashleigh was roused from the deep sleep into which he had immediately fallen, by being roughly shaken by a man who warned him that he must rise quickly to answer the muster. Half asleep he staggered out of the hut to where the prisoners were assembled in the darkness. The camp constable with a lanthorn, accompanied by a train of watchmen,

RALPH RASHLEIGH

appeared, and the names of the prisoners belonging to the hut were called and answered to, Rashleigh being the last called upon to respond. He, in his raw simplicity, asked the constable where he was to sleep.

'Whereon 'ee like, and be dommed to 'ee!' shouted the constable.

'But where shall I get my bed and blanket?'

'I'll tell 'ee what,' roared the other angrily, 'on'y I thinks 'ee be a fool by what 'ee've been up to at Sydney. I'd knock 'ee down for axing me such a dommed daft question, but I'll compute it to yer ignorance and tell 'ee. There bain't no blankets for nobody in the stores; there's scores of men here a'ready wi'out any, an' many on 'em has been so for more nor these two years, so doan't 'ee be bothering me any more, or I'll be dommed if I doan't find a shop for 'ee.'

As Rashleigh followed the party of convicts into the hut he heard one man observe: 'Old Tom Row must be getting softish, not putting the chatty new chum into chokey,' and the man addressed say: 'Aye, I've knowed a dozen men put in for less than half that provocation.'

Rashleigh asked them what he had said that could be regarded as a crime.

'Lord bless you,' answered the first speaker, 'you're naught but a motherless cub with all your sorrows to come. You'll soon find out that the jacks-in-office here don't need no provocation to get a man flogged. They just spend their time thinking out ways to do so without a cause.'

Rashleigh digested this cheerful bit of knowledge of his new home, and asked what the rest of the blanketless ones did about bedding. He was told that some managed to steal a few sheepskins from passing drays, and made shift to sew them together, while others had found a way of preparing tea-tree bark to make some sort of substitute; and the man

THE MEMOIRS OF

offered to show him how this was done as soon as he could find time.

Rashleigh thanked his informant and made the best of the worst by settling down to sleep, hungry as he was, in the ashes of the fire, where he slumbered until noisy bustle in the hut awakened him. He saw that it was morning and that most of the inmates had left the hut, and that the remainder were running out as if in great haste. He leapt up and followed the throng of men hurrying through the camp gate, when just as he was about to pass through the tolling of the camp bell ceased. Instantly a red-faced man, mounted on a black mare, rode into the gateway so that no more men could pass, roaring:

‘Stop there, you sons of butchers! I’ll learn you fellows to come smarter to muster. Here, Sam, take down their names.’

Sam was a clerk of most unclerkly appearance, and began to take down the names of all men inside the gate, when the principal overseer walked up.

‘Oho! my fine quill-driver,’ he called, singling out Rashleigh, ‘you are beginning well, at any rate. Here, Joe, take that chap into your mob, and try if you can’t waken him up a bit.’

The man styled Joe, a bandy, chocolate-complexioned little Jew, obeyed with alacrity.

‘Come you here, sir,’ he said. ‘S’help mine Gott, I’ll stir you up before night!’

The names of all the men were read over, and the gangs with their tools began to move off. Joe, the overseer, ordered Rashleigh to take up a coil of rope that lay near and bring it along. The convict looked at the rope, which appeared to him heavy enough to load a mule, and bending down attempted to lift it, but found it beyond his strength.

‘Curse and blast you, for a skinny-gut!’ shouted the Jew.

He called two men and made them lift the rope and place it on Rashleigh's back. He managed to stagger along a few paces, but finding steady walking impossible, he began to run, but tripped and came down heavily, cutting his chin upon a jagged root, and rose bleeding profusely. Joe, however, was merciless, and had the rope replaced on his back, and repeated the operation every time he fell under the weight of his burden. At last, trembling in every limb from over-exertion, Rashleigh with the rest of the gang reached the spot where they were to work.

Overseer Joe's gang were occupied in burning off the trees which had been felled in course of the vast task of clearing the land for arable culture. Some were detailed to cut up the boughs and trunks; others carried the pieces and piled them round the stumps and set the great stacks alight, tending them until they were entirely reduced to ashes. Rashleigh with about a dozen others were ordered under the direct surveillance of the overseer to the task of rolling out the trunks and getting them to the fires. A favourite trick of this petty tyrant was to select a heavy log, have it rolled on to six handspikes, each manned by two men, and once it was lifted on to the handspikes, order six of the men away on the pretext that the six remaining men could easily carry the log. Thus the six men had to strain every nerve, as, if one gave way, the log would fall to the earth, and the defaulter would be sure of condign punishment from Joe, who would not hesitate to have every man flogged for neglect of work, or, at the least, confined in the 'Belly Bot' for that night.

This and kindred brutal practices were indulged in by the overseers as a regular part of the routine by which they got the work done and held their jobs. It was connived at by the Superintendent, whose personal interest was to see that as

THE MEMOIRS OF

much work was done as possible. As the overseers had to answer to him, so had he to answer to his superiors. For his own reassurance that there should be no slackness, his practice was to select from the convicts the worst behaved and most indolent as overseers and other subordinates, his theory being that such men, being most afraid of hardship and work themselves, would not be squeamish as to the methods by which they carried out his wishes, and maintained their own positions. There was almost competition among the overseers in severity of treatment, and if one, working a gang of fifty men, had ten of them flogged every week, it was arithmetically certain that another, with only twenty-five men under him, would see to it that not less than five of his gang were taken to court.

It was from a similar motive that the Superintendent would put two equal gangs of men at the same kind of work alongside each other, so that the overseers would overwork their separate gangs in order to accomplish more work each by his own men. The rough treatment of the convicts which resulted from this and other methods of brutal oppression is something which is known to at least a few living people from the talk of their elders, and doubtless there are grandchildren now in the colony who have heard traditional tales of what their forbears suffered.

Rashleigh and his fellow-gangsmen were soon grimed from head to foot and half blinded with smoke from the fires, while his naked feet felt as if they were continuously burning. He had not recovered from the terrible exertion of humping the heavy coil of rope and, being unused to heavy muscular labour, he was in a state of semi-collapse, when with some others he was put to the handspikes to help turn a great butt of a tree which was partly embedded in the earth. Scarcely able to see, and awkward from un-

familiarity with his task, he placed the handspike's end between the trunk of the tree and a broken limb, forming a sharp angle to the trunk. When, with much swearing and sweating, the log was moved, it went over with a sudden jerk, wrenching the handspike out of his grasp, so that it whizzed like a twirling arrow through the air, tearing a portion of the brim from Overseer Joe's hat as it flew close past him. Joe was transported with rage at his near brush with a nasty death, and came rushing towards Rashleigh, noisy with curses and threats. He was pulled up short, however, by an enormous Jew lizard, a species of reptile deriving its name from the membraneous bags around its jaws, which distend when it is enraged, forming a resemblance to a human beard. Joe lifted the lizard on his toe and kicked with all his force at Rashleigh, who, acting instinctively, struck at the hurtling reptile with his right hand, so that it was flung back into the face of the oncoming overseer: it dropped, but caught at the clothing on his chest and attacked him viciously. One of the convicts sprang forward, knocked it off and beat it to death.

Joe ordered Rashleigh to be seized by the deputy-overseer and the gang's water-carrier, who hustled him to a tree-trunk, to which they secured him by a chain, having first handcuffed his hands behind his back. Then Joe came up.

'You blasted varmint,' he snarled, 'I'll teach you to mutiny and try to take mine life!'

He then struck his defenceless prisoner over the head and returned to the gang. The Superintendent, on his daily round, came up to Rashleigh chained to the tree and heard from Joe that the prisoner had hurled his handspike at him, and attempted his life, showing his torn shirt and hat as proof of the truth of his fabrication.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Let him be confined in camp until next Tuesday, and then brought to court,' ordered the Superintendent, and at dinner-time Rashleigh was marched back and handed over to old Tom Row.

'Oho! thee be'est a dangerous beast!' he said, with a grin. 'Oi'll take care thee does no more dommage for a while.'

He thereupon dragged Rashleigh to an unroofed triangular space, enclosed by the walls of two huts and a high palisade, through a strong wicket in which he thrust his prisoner with a force that sent him headlong, losing his hat as he went through.

'There,' jeered Tom Row, 'thee bees safe enough now! Thee'll knock nobody's brains out now, I'll warrant thee, unless it's thee's own.'

The sun was at its zenith, and Rashleigh, being bare-headed, was soon giddy and sick from the heat upon his throbbing head, but it was not until middle afternoon that he was able to sit in the shadow of one of the walls of his open-air prison. His dinner, a morsel of salt meat and a dumpling of boiled maize meal, had been brought to him soon after he was thrown in, but his heat sickness made him unable to eat anything for some time. When, after the shade had relieved his agony somewhat, he wished to eat, he had to drop to his knees and lie on his belly and gnaw his food on the dish like an animal, owing to his hands being fettered behind his back. In this state he was left from Thursday until the following Tuesday, without the handcuffs being removed. The autumn nights were as piercingly cold as the days were hot, and the dews were heavy, so that he spent the nights shivering in wet clothes. Aching and fatigued as he was, sleep was almost an impossibility, as he could not lie down with any ease, and the

pain in his wrists and arms was increasingly excruciating. Long before Tuesday came he longed for death, and once in his torment ran his head violently against an angle of one of the sheds in the hope of accomplishing unconsciousness, if not death itself. His strength was too far spent to enable him to inflict more than numbing bruises on his skull.

At last Tuesday morning came and Tom Row came to release him. Fouled with his own excrement, his whole body loathsome with dirt, it was decided that he must wash before being taken to court. His handcuffs were taken off for this purpose, but the anguish of bringing his arms round into their natural position was so intense that he collapsed in a swoon. He came to in a puddle of water, which a sneering constable had flung over him from a bucket. His wrists were swollen to twice their natural size, and when he tried to wash, he found that he could not bend his elbows. The constable therefore assisted him, with rough and obscene comments, and presently he was ready to start for the dreaded court.

When it came to re-handcuffing him, there could not be found a single pair of darbies to fit his swollen wrists, and the officials were therefore grudgingly compelled to have him taken to Penrith without any. He was put in charge of a constable, who was given strict orders to crack his head if he made the slightest attempt to escape. They reached the court-house without any incident, Rashleigh being too weak and spent even to want to escape. There were a great many men from Emu Plains brought up to answer various charges, mostly fabricated by the tyrannical overseers, and the majority of them had been summarily tried and sentenced to seventy-five or a hundred lashes, before Rashleigh's turn came to appear before the court.

THE MEMOIRS OF

While he was waiting, a man came out from judgment, his face alight with smiles, who, on being asked why he looked so pleased, answered: 'Oh, I'm in luck to-day. I've only got life to Newcastle!' The poor devil was so sick of Emu Plains that the prospect of spending the rest of his life in the coal mines was pleasing.

Ralph was placed in the dock before the bench of magistrates, consisting of an old parson, an old settler, and a young military officer who had only recently been appointed. Overseer Joe was sworn, and recounted his lying story of a murderous attack by the prisoner, producing his shirt and hat in evidence to the Superintendent, winding up by asserting that 'he had never knowed a more desperate and dangerous ruffian.'

The military magistrate called upon Rashleigh to state his defence, though the old settler was impatient, muttering something about 'as clear a case as ever I heard in court.' The third magistrate was sleeping soundly on the Bench. Rashleigh gave a clear and intelligible account of what actually had happened, and at the end of his recital, the military man asked him how his wrists came to be so swollen, to which he replied with an account of his recent confinement. Being new to the country, and the treatment of the convicts, the new magistrate was shocked at such treatment, and asked the old settler whether it was possible that such brutality was tolerated. The settler replied unemotionally that it was normal and necessary, as only the most stringent measures sufficed to control the turbulent spirits of the convicts, and that doubtless the prisoner was much better known to the authorities of Emu Plains than to them, and that, in brief, it was the Bench's duty to support the Government establishment. Rashleigh caught what was being said, and at once declared that his alleged offence had taken place

RALPH RASHLEIGH

on his first working day on Emu Plains, and that this was the first charge that had been brought against him since his arrival in Australia. The captain asked him if he had witnesses to prove his case, and on the prisoner naming two or three men who were working in his party, and despite the objections of the settler, the captain carried a proposal for a remand.

‘Let the prisoner be closely confined over here till next court day so that he cannot see or speak to any of the witnesses he has named. We will examine them ourselves, and if it is proved that he has tried to impose upon us, we will give him one hundred lashes in addition to the punishment for his alleged crime.’

On next court day Rashleigh was brought before the same Bench of magistrates, with the parson in the chair for the day. The clerk read over the overseer’s deposition and the prisoner’s defence, but before the reading was finished the chairman was sound asleep, and the settler, oblivious to what was proceeding, hidden behind a newspaper. The military gentleman then examined the four witnesses who had been named by the prisoner, and it was no easy task to force answers from them, their evidence being given with reluctance born of the fear of Overseer Joe’s vengeance when they should be back on the Plains. Their stories were, however, explicit corroborations of Rashleigh’s account, and the captain was satisfied.

‘Now, what do you propose?’ he asked the settler.

‘Oh, Captain, I leave it entirely to you,’ was his sarcastic answer. ‘When you have been in this country as long as I, you will pay less heed to what fellows like these either say or swear.’

The captain shook the slumbering chairman of the Bench, asking him for his decision on the case.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'A most dreadful scoundrel, an atrocious villain!' he cried, jumping with a start to his feet. 'Send him to Newcastle – and if he won't stop there, send him – aye! – send him to eternity!'

'But,' remonstrated the captain, 'it don't appear to me that he is guilty of any offence at all. Mr. Clerk, read over to-day's evidence.'

While this was being done the reverend chairman settled himself to enjoy another nap, but was again aroused by the insistent captain, and gave summary judgment.

'Well, give him a hundred lashes: it will smarten him up a bit.'

'Pardon me,' insisted the captain, 'I can't see that he has deserved any punishment, or, even if he has, what he has already suffered must be taken into consideration.'

Rashleigh listened wearily, wondering when this farce of a trial would end.

'Oh, you don't know yet the artfulness of these scoundrels,' answered the unabashed chairman. 'You had better give him seventy-five, at any rate.'

The military magistrate was not to be persuaded from justice.

'No, I think we may let him go this time,' he said. 'But if ever he comes up again we will double his punishment.'

'Well, well, let it be as you please, Captain,' agreed the parson, with an air of smug resignation. 'I think the overseers should be supported in their duty.'

'I agree. But this man has been in strict confinement for twelve days, and we'll let that go for his present punishment. Prisoner,' he continued, addressing Rashleigh, 'you are discharged.'

Rashleigh was removed and was about to leave for camp in charge of a constable at the rising of the court, when

RALPH RASHLEIGH

Overseer Joe came up to him, his brownish-yellow cheeks livid with rage, and shook his fist in the prisoner's face.

'Gott strike me dead, you bastard, if you ain't the very first man that ever beat me at court! I'll take blasted goot care you don't come off free next Tuesday.'

As Rashleigh shrank away from the threatening bully, a commanding voice called through the venetian blinds of an adjacent window.

'Come here, you, sir.'

At the summons Joe's jaw dropped, and he made to slink quickly away, when the blinds were thrust sharply aside, and the head of the military magistrate appeared.

'Here, you, sir—you overseer, I mean—come back instantly.'

There was a note in his voice that brought the reluctant overseer round, hat in hand.

'Now, sir,' said the magistrate angrily, 'I overheard your language just now, and I've a mind to give you the soundest flogging for the blasphemous impiety of your oath, but as the court has risen, I will overlook that. But I warn you to have a care, for if I catch you again tripping in an oath, I'll prosecute you for perjury; and, by Heaven, I'll make you wish you had never been born. Now, off to your duty, and beware.'

The warning gesture with which he dismissed Joe was more eloquent of his meaning than all his words. Joe, thoroughly cowed, sneaked away, and put as great a distance between himself and Penrith court-house as haste could accomplish.

Back in camp Rashleigh was received by his fellow-convicts with a kind of awe. They regarded him much as children do a conjurer who has startled them by the magic of an incredible illusion. He had, to them, accomplished the

THE MEMOIRS OF

impossible, for never in the memory of any of them had a working prisoner on Emu Plains obtained a decision against an overseer, or even got so much as the benefit of a doubt. To have ridden over Joe added to the marvel, for he was, as one man put it, 'Able to swear that a white horse was a chandler's shop, and every hair upon its back a pound of tallow candles,' rather than be beaten.

Rashleigh slept comfortably that night, as a man had run away, leaving behind a nook formed of a sheet of bark like a boxed shelf, which was filled with the inner husks of Indian corn. He was roused from his first snug sleep since he had come to the camp by a tremendous hullabaloo of sound dominated by the noise of beaten tins, which reminded him of the practice of folk in the homeland when swarming their bees. In answer to his startled inquiry he was told that the row was made by a bunch of men who had decided to run away, and were using this means of beating up recruits for the bush. It appeared that scarcely a week passed without some men bolting, preferring the dangerous risks of the bush to enduring any longer the raw tyranny of overseers, constables, watchmen, and other petty bullies. Often, he learnt, these petty officers paid their fellow-convicts to make a show of escaping, so that they might gain, for recapturing them, either a monetary reward or a remission of sentence. It was the rule that anyone who recaptured a runaway convict could choose between a sum of ten shillings or a remission of six months' penal servitude. The practice had consequently become rife for the overseers so to terrify and torment some poor fellow, breaking his spirit with continuous hardship and hunger, that he was only too ready to fall in with their plot if only to gain a few days' respite from the intolerable conditions which they imposed upon him.

The overseer, having reduced his victim to this state, would tempt him with bribes of food.

'Why the devil don't you bolt for it?' he would ask. 'I'll give you some grub to get rid of you.'

This formula was understood, and as the flogging which would follow his capture was well worth suffering for the bliss of three or four days' freedom, the man would gladly take the few pounds of flour and the small quantities of tea and sugar, and, with these, the promise of favoured treatment on his return, and make his quasi-escape. Before going he arranged with the overseer a rendezvous at which he would be waiting to be recaptured three or four days later.

The overseer would hale the victim before the magistrates, and put up an epic yarn of the difficulties he had surmounted and the fierce struggle he had had with his prisoner before he had finally dragged him back to camp. The magistrates accepted the story, of which corroboration was in any case impossible, and, if it were a first offence, the man was sentenced to a hundred lashes. On returning to work the overseer would seize the first opportunity of turning the crawler (as such men were called) out of his gang into that of a colleague, who would renew the treatment with the same results, except that the spirit-broken fellow was, on the second attempt, sentenced to a penal settlement.

By this inhuman method many convict-officers managed to shorten their sentences, while the men they crushed in the process were treated as incorrigibles and lost any hope of freedom before death.

The day after returning from Penrith court, Rashleigh was removed from Joe's gang into another engaged on timber-felling, under the discipline of a Welshman, known as David Muffin, the quality of whose brutality was revealed that day.

THE MEMOIRS OF

The gang were employed in pairs, one pair to each tree, and it chanced that two men were cutting down a giant tree which was decayed at the heart. Just as they had cut through the living timber, the tree snapped across instantaneously, toppled and crushed the two convicts beneath its great weight. Four of the men, working nearest to the scene, ran immediately to the help of their comrades, only to find them shapeless masses of pulped flesh and shattered bones. Appalled by the suddenness of the tragedy, they stood gaping, when Davy Muffin, his foul lips streaming with oaths, ordered his satellites to handcuff the four of them for daring to leave their work without permission. On the next Tuesday, they all received fifty lashes as punishment for this crime.

Under such a man Rashleigh, awkward at his work through ignorance of method and physical weakness, gave the bully plenty of scope for harsh treatment, and learnt before the first day was done that there was a rough *esprit de corps* among the overseers on the Plains; and realized, too, that it would have been better for him had he lost his case and taken a hundred lashes.

The overseer, at the sound of the bell which ended work for the day, ordered his deputy to collect the men and tools, and set off towards camp. Rashleigh was again loaded with the heavy rope – the usual burden, he was told, of the last man to join a gang – and was in consequence among the last to arrive back in camp, at the tool-house. Davy, Joe and other overseers were standing there by a number of men, handcuffed to a chain in pairs, and guarded by camp constables. He was ordered to be handcuffed with the rest, wondering what new species of tyranny he was to endure. In a few minutes the miserable file of men, to the clank of fetters, were marched towards an auxiliary prison, known

RALPH RASHLEIGH

strangely as the Belly Bot, situated under the first range of the Blue Mountains, about a mile from camp.

This place of confinement was subdivided into cells, measuring about seven feet by four, and eight feet high, into each of which the men were literally crammed until the cell was packed tight with standing men, upon whom the doors were crushed shut, so that the men could scarcely move so much as an arm or a leg. In this condition they were left for the night. Imagination refuses to face the full loathsomeness of this sleepless, foodless, latrine-less state, of men herded in bitterness.

The doors of these fouled cells were thrown open and the men ordered to get off to muster. The fear of being late, and so receiving more and worse punishment, made them hurry to camp, and frequently – so late were they released – they scarcely had time to seize a morsel of food to eat on their way to work.

Five nights at least out of each week, to teach him the unwisdom of winning a case against authority at court, for nearly three months Rashleigh was condemned to the infernal Belly Bot; and also for the six months following his trial was 'lumbered' – that is, compelled to work for Government on Saturdays. The rule was that the men of good conduct were free from ten o'clock in the morning on Saturdays to mend and wash their clothing. Thus did Davy Muffin avenge the insult to the dignity of overseership inflicted upon it by Rashleigh.

During his long spell of the Belly Bot treatment, he witnessed an incident which was tragic and also inspiring. There was a man named Bright, of a gloomy, morose temper, who had been confined with him one night, and Rashleigh had noticed particularly that he had borne his punishment in silence, without a grumble or an oath. On

THE MEMOIRS OF

reaching camp in the morning he went as usual to the tool-house for a narrow felling axe, and, on the way to muster, happened to pass his overseer.

'Here, Tom,' he asked, 'what made you put me in Belly Bot last night? I hadn't done aught.'

The overseer laughed: 'Oh, for a lark, you bloody fool!' he answered lightly.

Rashleigh gasped with excitement at the sudden change in Bright's appearance. The man's eyes suddenly fired, every muscle in his body seemed to flex, while his face went dead white with rage.

'Then take that for a lark!' he snarled, as he swung his axe high with an almost gleeful gesture and brought it crashing down with such force that the overseer's head was cleaved to the jaw-bone, in which the axe remained faststuck. So sudden and unexpected was the attack that the overseer had not time so much as to cry out for help. One moment the taunt was in his teeth, and the next he was dead.

Bright struggled to free his axe, but before he could do so the camp constables, who had been paralysed by the swiftness of the attack, rushed upon him and secured him. He made no attempt at resistance, saying to his captors with the utmost coolness:

'If only I could have got my axe loose, I'd have made dog's meat of a dozen more of you bloody tyrants!'

At the trial, when called upon for his defence, he showed neither remorse nor repentance.

'I was tired of the whole damned business. Life was just hell,' he said morosely. 'All I wish is that I was to swing for killing a hundred blasted overseers, instead of one, you lot of miserable tyrants!'

This man's outbreak – for which he was hanged – had no ameliorating effect upon the treatment of the prisoners of

Emu Plains. On the contrary, their oppression became more brutal than ever, and each overseer was provided with a heavy club, for protection, and if a man so much as looked sideways at him the overseer did not hesitate to knock the man down.

'You're going to Bright me, are you!' became a catchword among the overseers, and was inevitably preliminary to a crack over the head with a club.

The period during which Rashleigh was on Emu Plains was one during which the whole colony was suffering from the effects of a severe drought, no rain having fallen in sufficient quantities to cause vegetation for over two years. The inhabitants were reduced to a state of semi-starvation; wheat was selling at seventy shillings a bushel and maize at forty shillings, and the supply of either grain was extremely meagre. Such was the neediness of the poorer class of free colonists that, when the Government cattle on Emu Plains were being slaughtered each week to supply meat for the prisoners' rations, the stockyard was besieged by old and young begging the entrails and offal from the convict-butchers.

Terrible as were the conditions of the free population of the district, those of the convicts were immeasurably – and naturally – worse. The weekly ration per man at this time was about five and one-half pounds of flour, nine pounds of beef and three and one-half gills of pease or rice, with which they were supposed to make twenty-one meals, and keep fit and strong for the heavy work which was expected of them. When, as in some Government establishments, the rations were served out in one issue for the whole week, the half-starved wretches would frequently consume the lot in from one to three days and starve completely for the remainder

THE MEMOIRS OF

of the week, eking out a meal with what grasses and herbs they could find still growing, and eating unhesitatingly snakes, rats, lizards, and other repugnant foods.

As an instance of the lengths to which hunger drove these men: on one occasion a gang were working near a road over the Blue Mountains and coaxed away from a traveller a fine dog. As it approached they caught it round the neck with a lasso-noose, and killed it. Shortly afterwards the owner returned on his tracks, searching for the dog, and on reaching the roadside camp found a gaunt, emaciated wretch busily skinning his pet's head. On questioning the fellow the owner learnt that, as soon as the beast had been skinned, there had ensued a sanguinary fight for bits of the dog's carcass, during which he had only managed to secure the head, which, he averred, had little eatable upon it.

On Emu Plains rations were issued daily, which ensured the men getting at least one meal a day, but the quantity was manifestly insufficient, and many were the methods pursued to augment the official food. Peaches grew in profusion along the river banks, and at spots nearer to camp, but by the time the fruit had reached the size of nuts it was plucked and devoured, either boiled or raw. The ripening of the maize crop provided the starvelings with another opportunity. To leave the camp after the evening muster at eight o'clock was an offence punishable by one hundred lashes, but the men made no bones about the risk of capture, but would steal off to the cornfields carrying an old tin dish covered with a grater – a fiddle, as they called it – and spend hours of the night grating the scarcely ripe cobs of maize, creeping back to camp with their booty of pulpy meal.

The rules on Emu Plains during this period of scarcity throughout the country were stringent even for that home of harshness. If a constable or watchman, an entering a hut

RALPH RASHLEIGH

in the course of their regular evening duty, saw even the point of a cob of maize in the ashes of the fireplace, where they were sometimes roasted by the convicts, he would insist upon the man nearest to the fire to point out the maize thief. If he could not, or would not do so, the man was confined, tried at the next court, and was certain to receive at least seventy-five lashes, whether or not he had been roasting a 'Hawkesbury duck,' the colonial name for a cob of maize.

The wonder was that Rashleigh and others were not tempted to commit suicide, as death could scarcely hold more suffering, hardship and misery than the life to which they clung. It would, however, almost seem as though men actually value life in inverse ratio to their enjoyment of it. He, at any rate, declared later that never during his periods of criminal prosperity in England had he valued life so highly in itself as he did during the worst days of his servitude as a convict on Emu Plains and elsewhere. He did not hear of a single case of suicide among the convicts during his entire stay there.

CHAPTER IX

AMONG the prisoners was an irrepressible little Cockney named Jemmy King, who was responsible for the only occasion of real pleasure which was enjoyed in camp during Rashleigh's stay on Emu Plains. King was a man with a personality, and was appreciated even by the overseers and the Government officials for his gifts as a comic genius. At mimicry and patter he was a master of mirth, and by some process of wheedling his jailers he succeeded in getting permission to establish a theatre at the camp. He instituted himself – *faute de mieux* – as architect, carpenter, manager, scene-painter, mechanic and producer, also casting himself for the leading comic rôle in whatever plays were produced. He could not read or write, his method of learning his part being to listen to the play being read over; and at rehearsal he was always word-perfect.

He took charge of the building of the rough theatre, seeing to it that all gaps between timbers were literally filled with mud, and he had the whole of the interior thoroughly whitewashed with pipeclay. The Superintendent gave the venture his blessing, and supplied King with such indispensable things as he could not otherwise obtain. Life on the plains was almost as tedious for the officials in charge as it was for the convicts themselves, and at this time Jemmy King was as popular with the oppressors as with the oppressed. Rough benches served for seats, and under the guidance of the indefatigable jack-of-all-trades, boxes were erected for the comfort of the quality who had signified their intention of being present at the performance. To anyone but King, the problem of supplying costumes and canvas for scenery would have been insoluble, but his inventiveness was equal to the handicap. He begged or stole remnants of

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

bags, worn duck clothing, bed-ticks and what not, sewed them together, and painted his crude designs with distemper, pipeclay, charcoal, and coloured earths. Out of tin cans he fashioned the necessary lamps and candlesticks, and cajoled the wicks, oil and candles from the officials out of their rations from Government stores. The needful wardrobe he fabricated with astonishing ingenuity, borrowing and begging any clothes that he could come by, and converting them to his purposes by brilliant adventures in tailoring and decoration. He threw himself into making the production a success with infectious enthusiasm, and by the time the first dress rehearsal was called and performed, his energies were justified by a relatively flawless performance, finely staged within his limitations.

The news of this theatrical venture among the convicts had been noised abroad, and it became known that Sir John Jamison,¹ the then Chief Justice, and his family had let it be known that they would honour the performance by being present as they were then in residence at Regentville. This put King on his mettle. He was sure enough of pleasing the majority of the expected audience, which would be composed mainly of the small settlers on the Nepean River, and their wives and children, people whose experience of theatrical

¹ Sir John Jamison inherited large estates at Regentville from his father, Thomas Jamison, surgeon's first mate on H.M. ship *Sirius* in the first fleet, to whom the land was granted. John Jamison was created a knight of the Order of Gustavus Vasa by Charles XIII of Sweden, for his services during an outbreak of cholera and dysentery in the Swedish Army in 1807, when he was surgeon in the English Navy on service in the Baltic Sea.

Sir John was not Chief Justice, but was almost certainly a Justice of the Peace, and probably chairman of the Bench of Magistrates for the district. The convicts would know of his position only by gossip, and the description of his position in the text is a natural error of a man writing from memory of events of many years ago.

THE MEMOIRS OF

production was limited to the exhibitions given by travelling mountebanks and strolling companies performing in barns. So King worked upon his amateur material so that they should delight and win praise from the very representative of royalty.

The list of pieces in which the convict-actors had been trained and rehearsed was laid before the Superintendent, who forwarded it to Sir John Jamison for selection. *Raymond and Agnes*, to be followed by *The Devil to Pay*, were chosen for the great night, and King set himself to perfect the final preparations. Everything had to be done in the evenings after heavy days of labour on the plains, and on Saturday; and during the time that remained before the production was due, the members of the cast had very little rest or sleep.

The evening came at last, and the Thespian convicts raced back from work in order to be dressed and ready for the rise of the curtain, which was advertised for seven o'clock. On the stroke of the hour, Jemmy King's masterpiece struck up the overture. This masterpiece was an orchestra of four instruments – a tin violin, a flute, a tambourine, and a great drum – out of which by some magic the players managed to produce tolerable melody.

The curtain went up, and the play went forward amid the enthusiastic plaudits of a mainly uncritical audience, to whom the crudest illusion was a joyous break in the monotony of hard farming existence. There was some criticism from a few convicts who had perched themselves on the roof timbers, but when the curtain came down their voices were silenced by a perfect storm of applause. The orchestra again played until expressions of satiety came from the audience, whereupon the curtain was again rung up upon *The Devil to Pay*. Again everything went well, though fortune may

RALPH RASHLEIGH

be said to have favoured Jemmy King's success in this. Only chance prevented the performance from ending in utter fiasco. Sir John Jamison had had a quantity of wine sent down from Regentville for the refreshment of the players, and the man who was playing the part of Jobson had drunk of it rather freely, and laid on with the stirrup leather to the shoulders of his sleeping partner, Nell, with a vigour that made the young man who was playing the woman's part wince with the sting of it. Jobson, noticing this, maliciously repeated the flogging when the action of the play did not require it, and Nell's patience became exhausted. He shook a fist, the size of a leg of mutton, in Jobson's face, and said in a luckily low voice:

'Damn your eyes, if you do that again I'll knock your bloody head off.'

A slight commotion in the pit at the moment prevented the audience hearing this unrehearsed speech, but there was loud applause for the gesture, especially from Sir John, which recalled the angry player to his senses, and the play proceeded without mishap to its end.

While the delighted audience were preparing to leave, Sir John requested that the whole company of performers should be presented to him at the entrance. In a few minutes the actors, still in their fustian, were mustered in lines on each side of the rude staircase at the entrance to the building. Led by the Superintendent, Sir John, his friends and some ladies, inspected this original company, and the ladies were especially intrigued to discover that Nell was in reality a brawny bullock-driver with full whiskers, which the man valued so highly that he had resolutely refused to shave, preferring the trouble of devising a special head-dress to hide them throughout the performance. The Chief Justice expressed interest in Rashleigh's rig as the conjurer,

THE MEMOIRS OF

and took a little persuading that the flowing wig which he wore was nothing but a piece of sheepskin.

'Necessity,' remarked Sir John, not very originally, with a smile, 'is the most fruitful parent of invention.'

He complimented Rashleigh upon his performance and, as he handed back the wig, slipped a sovereign unobserved into his hand, telling him in a low tone that it was for himself.

Sir John then formally expressed his high satisfaction at the entertainment, and, giving the manager, Jemmy King, a present to share with the company, departed with his friends. This, with other gifts from members of the audience, enabled King to hand ten shillings to each of the musicians and fifteen shillings to each of the play-actors.

By this time Rashleigh had spent eighteen months at the agricultural establishment at Emu Plains, and had become expert in adapting himself to the life in a way which enabled him to obviate some of the extremest hardships. He had been without footwear of any kind for over a year, and it was this lack which caused him the greatest physical suffering. In the warm season the burnt and broken clay became hard and sharp-edged and produced extremely painful stone bruises, while, on the burning-off ground where fires had bared the soil of grass, the short stems stiffened and sharpened by the flames pierced and tore at the soles of his feet, so that they were always too lacerated to allow the skin to harden and callous. There had been times during his first year when the slowest walking was agony, and many times he was punished for 'crawling' – malingering – as a result. In the winter frost-bite was added to the horror of continually lacerated feet, until with time his desperate search for some substitute for shoes materialized in a pair of crude wooden sandals, held to the feet with a complicated assortment of grass-

woven straps. Encouraged by the enormous comfort which he derived from this invention, he experimented to find some means of protecting his legs from the knee to the ankle, which were continually torn by thorns and briery vines, in the course of his work. For months he gathered any odd scraps of rags that he could find, and at last assembled enough to make up a pair of patchwork stockings. Even more important to his state of mind than these slight ameliorations of his bodily condition, was the gradual adaptation of his mind to an acceptance of the harsh conditions which he could not in any case escape, so that in consequence he was now able to sleep free of the terrifying dreams which had for long tormented him.

The drought broke during the first months of his second year, and the simple fact of the fresh beauties of the countryside flourishing after two years of partial death, made him feel on better terms with life. He had also about two pounds in cash saved, mainly derived from his windfall at the theatrical show, with which to buy extra food until harvest, when he hoped to earn more. This was his state of relative comfort when autumn came and reaping began.

It was a fixed custom, instituted for the benefit of the free settlers who otherwise could not have found sufficient labour to get in their crops, for the Superintendent of Emu Plains to grant passes to such convicts as he thought deserving of the privilege, entitling them to absent themselves from camp from Thursday evening until Sunday evening each week during harvest. It was a privilege greatly desired, and the work and conduct of the convicts noticeably improved for weeks while the grain was ripening, in order to gain passes for harvesting.

Rashleigh obtained one and, with a fellow-prisoner, crossed the Nepean River in high glee, and set out to find

THE MEMOIRS OF

work. By ten o'clock on Thursday evening they reached a stretch of country along the river broken up into farms occupied by small settlers, where the wheat was very well advanced. Walking through the brightness of the harvest moon, they could hear the settlers talking and shouting at their work. They were at first surprised that work should be going forward at so late an hour, but they learnt later that it was then the invariable practice of Australian farmers to do as much as possible of the work about their land at night and in the early morning, sleeping and resting during the middle hours of the day, when the heat made hard labour almost impossible. The two men came to a part of the Regentville estate known as Irish Corner, after the nationality of its tenant, and found a great number of people hard at the reaping. Men, women, boys and girls were wielding sickles with swift energy, laughing and jesting in a mood that revealed their enjoyment of the job.

They waited by the fence for the leader of the reapers to come up. The man greeted them, and learning that they were seeking work, immediately offered to take them on at a pound per acre, which wage did not appeal to Rashleigh as adequate.

'We'll look about for a bit among your neighbours,' he said, 'and if we can't get a higher offer, we'll come back and set to along with you.'

'By this and by that, thin, you won't,' retorted the angry Irish settler. 'If you go streeling around looking for more wages, you shan't touch not a straw of Pat Canavan's wheat, see that now!'

Rashleigh and his mate moved on while the muttering Irishman went by to his reaping, and at the next farm they saw five reapers working, an elderly man somewhat ahead of his companions. Hard-favoured, lean-flanked, and limber

in spite of his sixty years, the leader straightened as he saw them.

'Good morrow, boys,' he greeted them heartily, 'is it me you want?'

'We want to know if you can give us work with you?'

'Bedad then, I cud do that same,' replied the settler eagerly. 'But what wud you be axing?'

'Well, we're reasonable,' said Rashleigh; 'we'll take what the others are getting.'

'That's foine,' came the ready response. 'I'll tell you at a word what I'll do. If you'll work in alongside of us here, and work sweep for sweep wid us, I'll pay you a pound for every day you stop. It's ripening in patches my whate is, and raped it must be in them same patches; so it would be inconvenient to mizzure what's cut.'

'And about our mess?' queried the shrewd convict.

'Sure, I was forgettin'. Why, if you plaze me, it's not a traneeen I'll be charging you for all you'll ate of the best of good living, such as I've got for myself.'

The terms were agreed, and, provided at once with sickles, the two convicts were directed to side over, Rashleigh's companion working alongside the settler, with Rashleigh between two slim and agile reapers, dressed in nothing but long shirts and hats. None of them wore shoes, yet they went forward over the stubble at a pace that compelled the new-comers to 'hit out from the muscle' in order to keep abreast the line. For two hours they reaped the moonlit wheat, only the riscing of the sickles breaking the pleasant silence. Presently Rashleigh noticed that his fellows had paused in their work, and straightening his aching spine, he saw the settler leaning against the fence, deep in talk with his mate. He bent to his task again until he and the others

THE MEMOIRS OF

had cut right up to the fence, where he also lay down his sickle and took a breather.

'Bedad, lad,' said the old man, 'but it's foine rapers that you and your mate are. We'll soon cut all that's ready at this rate.'

The rest of the reapers came up and took a stand-easy, but after a few minutes the old settler turned to them.

'Now, gals, you and these two young men had better bind what's cut while the dew's on it, and leave the sheaves lying, we'll stook them by daylight. I'll go and help the old woman get together summat for bregguest.'

Rashleigh had started to hear his companions addressed as girls, and looked closely at the one standing next to him. Certainly there was little chance to show feminine charms in her present rig-out, but he saw that her figure was that of the other sex, and that, though she was near as tall as himself, she was actually a girl in her earliest teens. As the father walked away, the others fell to the less heavy task of binding the swathes of corn into sheaves, and as this afforded every opportunity for conversation, the girls and the new-comers were soon on terms of intimacy.

They were pleasant, unaffected children of nature, and answered all the visitors' questions with a childlike directness. The settler, known as Big Mick, was their father, who had a brood of six daughters, though several male children had been born to him, but had died in infancy.

'Dad's told me,' said one girl, 'how sad he was at not having a son to grow up wid him to help run the farm; and how when the third of us girls was born on him, he lamented to mother. Then mother she up and tells him, he said: "Yerrah, what are you boddering about! See if I don't make my darters better men than one-half of the breeched cray-

thurs I see crawling around the countryside; and, by the jakus, if I don't, I'll eat 'em, every one.'"

Rashleigh let his glance run down the slim, strong length of the active creature as she finished her little speech.

'And she certainly succeeded in her job,' he said gallantly. 'There's few men could reap better than you.'

'And why should they?' she rejoined with a pleased smile at his compliment, 'when we've all of us been at some work or other on the farm since ever we were able to toddle around and keep the pigs out of the mischief; pull suckers from the corn and the tobacco. You've seen us reap and bind, but it's telling you I am that any of us can fell a tree wid an axe, take a share in breaking the soil wid the hoe, drive a team of bullocks, and thresh the whate wid any man in the colony. Anyway, why wud you be surprised when every girl in Australia on the farms can do that same?'

'I can well believe you,' said Rashleigh, 'but, though it makes you good settlers, it's a poor look-out for the young men looking for wives to keep comfort for them in the house.'

She answered him straightly.

'That's true enough, though we do take turns at helping mother in the house. But we can bake a damper in the ashes, and see to the mending of a man's clothes, even if we couldn't make a shirt. And I dare say we can breed as well as any soft-raised woman who'd need gloves on to cut a few flowers for the table.'

Rashleigh was attracted by the sane frankness of her attitude, and saw no immodesty in her candid reference to woman's exclusive business in life. Evidently she would take to child-bearing with the same natural insouciance as she took to the axe and the hoe and sickle. She had none of the soft blooms of beauty, but her deeply tanned features

were handsome, and her body strong and lissome. One serious defect all the girls possessed as a result of their lives of early and continuous labour, and this was the unnaturally large size to which their feet grew, shoes being luxuries which were only worn on special occasions.

The unconstraint of their mode of existence made of them wild and boisterous creatures, strangers to the niceties of womanly conduct; but old Mick was father enough to love them and to do what was in his power to find them good husbands. Rashleigh was told of one instance in which his efforts were brought to nothing by the unrestrained manners of the girls.

'Big Mick' had concluded a deal with another settler, who produced a bottle of rum from his saddle bag with which to wet the bargain. He was a man of some means, possessing some good cattle and a couple of prolific brood mares, and he seemed to Mick to be an ideal partner for one of his daughters. Warming up under the influence of the spirit, taken in liberal tots, he began eloquently to inform the man of the qualities and attractions of his girls, saying, too, that he could afford to give a good portion to each of them.

'Any a one of them would be a foine chance for any man that 'ud know how to trate a wife decent, when they got her,' he said, and waited to see the listener swallow the bait, or at least make a show of interest.

The visiting settler, however, sat unimpressed, alternately sipping his grog and puffing at his pipe, with a calmness that exasperated the old man.

'Shure,' he went on, "'tis a shame on you, that you don't be looking out for some good little crathur to be keeping home for you, instead of living your lone all your days like a solithary bachelor. Arrah, but you shall see my darlints, annyhow.'

Out of politeness the man accompanied Big Mick to the yard outside, where the old fellow gave a loud 'cooe,' as a signal to the girls to come in from their work. Interested despite his apparent indifference, the visitor looked in the direction from which the girls were evidently expected.

Then they came, six wild and leaping bacchantes, shouting and laughing, like a troop of newly loosed colts, filling the paternal heart with pride, and his visitor with a kind of terror. Before the leaping girls had reached them, he had reached his horse.

'Good day to you, Mick,' he said with a laugh, as he mounted. 'I'd as lief marry a whirlwind as one of them wild devils. Why, my fastest mare would never be able to catch her.' And he rode ungallantly away, amid the roars of laughter from the girls and their father, who had the merry temperament that can laugh loudest when the joke is against him.

This story Rashleigh and his mate heard from their temporary employer while they sat at the 'breggust,' which he had gone to help prepare. The buildings of the farm, like most of those of the pioneering days in the colony, were an architectural history of the struggles and growth of fortune and family. The principal dwelling still consisted of only two apartments in which Mick and his wife had started their farming career. Now, all round it was an assortment of lean-to buildings, huts and sheds, all constructed of the same materials as the buildings at the prison camp—slabs of timber split from logs by driven wedges forming the walls, and the roofs being of stringy bark laid on rafters of sapling poles, and tied on with cords made from the inner rind of the kurrajong tree, with wooden pins acting as substitutes for nails wherever needed. The interior was whitewashed, including the ceiling of bark which was laid upon the tie

THE MEMOIRS OF

beams, thus forming a storage loft, and the fireplace occupied the whole of one end of the hut, at the sides of which rough ingleseats had been set for comfort on winter nights. In the chimney were hung pieces of salt beef and pork, pigs' heads, bags of cabbage and pumpkin seeds – everything indeed that needed to be kept dry.

The furniture, Rashleigh observed, was as crude as that in their camp huts, though there were more pots, pans, dishes and boilers. The two fixed tables were of unplanned slabs, and the seats were rough stools and a few round stumps of trees. The sleeping-rooms were furnished by the same harsh standard of comfort, the beds being fixed wooden slabs covered with bark, on which the family slept on chaff ticks in which multitudes of fleas found snug quarters.

Rashleigh, seeing for the first time the conditions in which the smaller free settlers lived in their task of taming the native country, found himself less disgusted with his own existence in the convict settlement, realizing that relatively he might be much worse off. If this minimum of comfort was all that lawful inhabitants could compass, it was scarcely for him as a malefactor to kick against the pricks. His short stay with Big Mick's family aroused in him feelings akin to those which had made him glad of an unlooked-for holiday as a boy. After the poor and sparse rations of the camp, the liberal helpings of salt beef, damper bread and pumpkins, washed down with unlimited measures of hot tea, made a feast which set his whole being aglow with peace and gratitude. After a pipe, the whole family returned to work. It was dawn, and work went forward until nine o'clock, when they returned to the dwelling-house for another meal, after which, happily tired, they retired to sleep. Ralph and his companion were given blankets and a corner of the loft in which to rest on a heap of soft corn husks. At four

RALPH RASHLEIGH

o'clock they were roused, and work was resumed. This routine continued for the three and one-half days of their leave, and on Sunday evening they received their wages, and Big Mick's thanks, the whole family pressing them to come again whenever they should get leave.

CHAPTER X

RASHLEIGH spent two other happy week-ends with Big Mick before harvest was over, by which time he had accumulated a useful store of money. The immediate need of convict labour among the neighbouring settlers having been satisfied, a number of them preferred a request to the Superintendent that the play-actors of Emu Plains should be permitted to go with their stage paraphernalia to perform a play at a distant part of the Nepean settlement. The required permission was given, and the convict-actors, with scenery, machinery, decorations, and so on, loaded on a settler's dray, set out for the scene of their next triumph, which was to be staged in a large barn belonging to the keeper of a small inn, who had lent the building, not without an eye upon ensuing profit.

On reaching their destination, the convicts at once got to work upon the preparation of the barn for the performance, and at the end of about two hours the innkeeper put in his appearance. He expressed great admiration of the metamorphosis which was happening to his barn, and ventured the suggestion that it must be dry work.

'I have some fine rum and some peach cider as good,' he said ingratiatingly. 'Plenty of both brews. I'll tell you what I'll do. You can have what you want now, and pay me out of the takings of the show, immediately after it is over.'

The actors gladly accepted this friendly offer, and had soon brightened themselves with generous quaffings of the drinks, which, indifferent in quality as they were, were nevertheless nectar to the unaccustomed palates of the convicts. About noon, the innkeeper sent a servant to inquire whether the company wanted dinner, which he was prepared to supply on the same terms. The men therefore adjourned to the

inn kitchen and sat down to a plentiful meal of beef, pork, green vegetables and damper bread, followed by hot weak rum, which, being equal in strength only to what sailors call three-water grog, had no intoxicating effect upon even the weakest-headed of the company.

The performance of the evening was even more successful than had been the *première* at Emu Plains, and the actors decided upon a real jollification to celebrate the occasion. The innkeeper, to whom they explained their wants, suddenly showed a change of face, and insisted upon instant settlement of the accounts for the day, before he would supply anything more. The bill was presented, and on examining its items, the company understood the guile which had lain behind their host's geniality. Each man was charged £1 2s. 6d. for the drinks, dinner and supper, itemized at three shillings for each meal, and the drinks entered as pints of rum and gallons of cider. The convicts declined to admit that they had had anything near the quantity of liquor charged for, to which the innkeeper retorted that there could be no mistake as he had served all the drinks personally. The manager examined the night's takings and discovered that, after deducting expenses, there was but a sum of £1 10s. for each leading player, and the much smaller wages agreed for the supernumeraries and scene-shifters. There was nothing for it but to inform the innkeeper that his extortionate charges could not be met, as they totalled more than the entire proceeds of the night's entertainment. Thereupon he agreed to accept the full earnings of the smaller fry as settlement of their share of the bill, on condition that the principals paid their share in full. He further undertook, with the connivance of the Chief Constable, to persuade their Superintendent to give them leave to stay over another night and give a repeat performance next even-

THE MEMOIRS OF

ing. This he succeeded in, and having received by far the greater part of the night's collection, allowed the company fresh credit on the understanding that a similiar settlement would occur after the second performance.

Manager Jemmy King spent some part of the night devising a scheme whereby to get even with the rascally landlord, and, in the morning, he called a council of his leading actors to acquaint them with it. The plan which he expounded was enthusiastically supported, and its execution deferred until the close of the evening show. The rest of the day was spent by the members of the company scouring the countryside with play-bills acquainting the settlers that there was to be an even more marvellous performance that evening. Rashleigh was a successful canvasser, and spent a day of merriment and flowing conviviality with one after another of the settlers, who were ready to seize any excuse to indulge in a drink, in celebration of the first season in seven years when their granaries were teeming with fat grain. It was a period of prosperity, and in Australia as in more ancient lands, Bacchus paid tribute gladly to successful Ceres. So it was that the settlers were only too happy to catch on to this unexpected chance of merrymaking which the convicts offered them. On his return from whipping up the audience, Rashleigh was told that everything had been done to ensure the success of the plot for out-manœuvring the extortionate owner of the barn, and was bidden by Manager King not to stint himself of whatever refreshment he had fancy to order before the burden of the evening's performance.

The temporary theatre was packed to the walls and doors, and the audience were in a mood of hilarious appreciation. Each point in the play was greeted with great gusts of applause and laughter, and the curtain came down upon the biggest success the Emu Plains dramatic company ever

hoped to have. Immediately upon the curtain fall, the company began swiftly and silently removing, through an opening in the back of the barn, every stick and stitch of their hard-won properties, from which point they were carried to the dray concealed among some swamp oaks, in a dell by the river, a short distance away, where in a few minutes the entire company were gathered with their gear, impatiently awaiting the appearance of Manager Jemmy King, the author of their get-away plot. His part had been cast by himself, and for fully a quarter of an hour he stood before the curtain taking extended and eloquent farewells from his audience, and delighting them with comic speeches of his appreciation of their distinguished support, and in generally enjoying the sound of his own fluency. Sensitive to the mood of his auditors, immediately he saw a move being made towards the exits, King concluded his oration with a series of low and lower bows, slipped behind the curtain and out through his cunningly-contrived aperture in the barn's end. Carefully closing the door, he made haste to join his confederates, leaving in liquidation of the landlord's claim a drop scene past further service and a dozen battered tin sconces with the candle-ends still in them.

The innkeeper had come to the theatre towards the close of the performance, and as the audience began to depart, took up his stand near the orchestra, awaiting the coming out of the actors from behind the curtain. The barn had emptied itself before uneasiness assailed the astute Boniface, aroused chiefly by the utter silence which filled the building. Anxious in any case to get back to his inn, which was filled with settlers with full pockets, he made his way on to the stage and lifted the ragged curtain, plunging boldly behind the scenes. A single guttering candle-end illuminated the quiet emptiness of the place which should have been full of

weary actors ready to pay the bill which he had in his pocket. For some moments he stared, utterly bewildered, as, to his knowledge as owner of the barn, there was but one way in and out, which could be reached only by walking the whole length of the place. At first he was tempted to believe that the actors were also conjurers and magicians, and he rushed off to his home to make inquiries. But no one had seen anything of the performers, and the darkness made pursuit a matter of almost certain failure. He therefore contented himself with vowing foul vengeance on the convicts, with whom he swore that he would get even, cost him what it might.

In the meantime Manager Jemmy King and his jubilant company had wasted no time in starting quietly upon their return journey to camp. They followed a grassy valley on the turf of which the horses' hoofs and the dray's wheels were soundless, waded the Nepean River, and came at last to a halt in a deeply-sunk dell where they could light a fire unseen by anyone. Here they made a good meal of the food which they had extracted from their thieving host under pretence of needing it for a stage supper, and washed it down with the two gallons of his much-vaunted rum which they had brought with them. Hilarious as was their mood at the success of their outwitting of Boniface, they were careful not to drink to excess, as they knew with certainty that he would waste no time in laying his complaint before the camp Commandant, and it was necessary that they should appear before this dreaded official in full and sober possession of their reasoning powers.

They reached camp just after sunrise, and having unloaded the properties, prepared themselves for the ordeal of examination which they were assured would soon be upon them. They were mightily relieved when Jemmy King volunteered

to stand as their spokesman. He told them all to go and carry on as they would on any other Sunday, while he lay down as if to sleep in the camp theatre.

At about seven o'clock the landlord made his appearance, accompanied by the Chief Constable of his district, whose face was still wreathed with smiles of amusement at the lugubrious tale which his companion had poured out to him. They went to the theatre at once, and, seeing Manager King lying as if asleep in his full Sunday rig, the innkeeper angrily shook him. King was a natural actor, and his yawning, blinking simulation of a suddenly awakened man, was one of his finest performances. The angry landlord stared at him.

'You,' he shouted, 'what do you and your blackguardly actors mean by running away without paying your reckoning?'

Jemmy King gazed at him as if uncomprehending, and then allowed his face to clear with a look of understanding.

'Oh, it's you, is it!' he retorted angrily. 'What the devil d'you mean by breaking in here and wakening me up? If you want to know, I'm telling you that we've all paid dear enough for all we ever had from you, and if you expect any more money, well, you'd best get it as best you can.'

The landlord met this defiance with an outpouring of indignation at such ingratitude for all his kindness to the rascally play-actors, and at last left King, to go to the Superintendent and lay his complaint before him. Very soon the entire dramatic company were ordered to present themselves before that high official, who, when they were paraded before him, demanded what they had to say to the charge which had been brought against them.

King opened his speech for the defence with humble apologies for being forced by the visitor to occupy the time of the Superintendent, and then briefly recounted the facts of

THE MEMOIRS OF

the first day's proceedings, emphasizing astutely the obvious charges made in the first day's bill. He then referred to the similarly extortionate second day's account, and asked his superior candidly whether it was possible that any of the men present – unaccustomed, as he knew them to be, to any intoxicating drinks – could have consumed the vast quantities of spirits charged against them in the space of about thirty-six hours, and still be sober enough to play both performances, and return quickly and orderly to camp. He humbly submitted that this fact alone proved the falsity of the landlord's charge.

The Superintendent was impressed by the speaker's logic, and proceeded to examine the two bills. He asked what food had been supplied, for which a charge of three shillings per meal per person had been entered, and on learning the humble quality of it, expressed the view that that charge was twice too much. Then, taking up the point of the pints of rum and gallons of cider, he could not believe that this amount had been consumed, as it was sufficient to keep every man of them drunk for at least a week, and yet here were the men alleged to have swallowed the quantity in thirty-six hours, as sober as men well could be.

'At the same time, sir,' he concluded, addressing the landlord, 'if you wish to pursue the matter, I will order the whole company to be brought before the Bench of magistrates, to answer any charge you may think fit to prefer against them. But I would recommend you to remember that there is an Act in Council in force which imposes a fine of five dollars for each offence of serving a convict with spirits, so that perhaps,' he went on with a grim smile, 'you might lose more by taking them to court than you would gain by making them pay, in the extremely doubtful case of your winning your case.'

RALPH RASHLEIGH

The landlord's dilemma was complete, and he had no alternative but to return whence he had come, mouthing impotent threats against Manager King and his fellow-conspirators.

One morning, soon after this episode, Rashleigh was kept back from work and informed that his stay at Emu Plains was ended. He was, he was told, assigned to the service of one Mr. Arlack, a small settler at Bunburry Curran, since called Airds; and having received instructions and directions for his journey and a pass for his protection, he departed, after saying farewell to his companions.

CHAPTER XI

IT was a shining spring morning on which Ralph Rashleigh walked away from the Government establishment which had been his only home for two years, and his mood was happier than any he had felt since landing in the colony. He was no longer doomed to herd with convicts; he was on his way to something like freedom; a man again, doing a man's work, with at least one free man for company. All desire to revert again to a criminal way of life had long since left him, and not for a moment did he think of escaping and taking to the only occupation of the fugitive convict — bushranging. There was not a happier man in Australia that morning. Privation and hardship had taught him an essential standard of well-being, and his joy was not affected by the knowledge that a handkerchief served to carry all that he possessed of worldly gear beyond the clothes he wore and a stock of four new shirts. In the pocket of his jacket was a little store of money amounting to something over four pounds.

Whistling, singing snatches of song, he tramped through the bush, passed the clustering farms along the river, and came presently into the gloomy twilight of a vast forest, peculiar for the uncanny silence that brooded in it. It harboured no singing birds, only the ungregarious bell-bird stabbed the omnipresent silence with its single sharp note, exactly resembling the sound of a bell-wether. The only animals which Rashleigh saw sharing the brown and green solitude with him were an occasional iguana, gaudily marked, spiralling its way up a tree, or a snake suddenly lighting up the dim ground with its brilliant colouring.

About noon, Rashleigh, tired and hungry, made a halt beside a pond. He lit a fire with his tinder-box and boiled

some tea in the quart pot which he had brought with him, which he drank with the food with which he had been provided for his first day's journeying. His simple meal done, he lay back upon the grass, smoking his pipe, and enjoying the most pleasant rest that he had had for over two years; so that he fell asleep until about three o'clock in the afternoon. He rose at once, packed his few belongings, and soldiered on. Since leaving the banks of the Nepean, he had not met a single human being, and he was beginning to wonder whether he was still heading in the right direction for the Southern Settlement to which he was bound, when he saw a little ahead of him a man, who must have joined the path on which he was walking by debouching from some other which joined it from the east. He quickened his pace and hailed the stranger, who stopped at once and waited for him to come up. They greeted one another, and Rashleigh at once inquired whether he was going right for Liverpool. The stranger, a slim youth, answered in a singularly sweet voice that he believed the road was the right one, but that he was himself almost a stranger to that part of the colony, explaining that he had lately been in Parramatta, but was now making his way from South Creek to Liverpool.

In a short while they came upon a main road, which the young traveller recognized as the main highway from Sydney southward by way of Liverpool, Campbelltown, Bunburry Curran (Airds), Appin, and farther. They stepped along together for half an hour, when they overtook a bullock cart, apparently without a driver, plodding steadily along; but, when they came alongside, they saw an old woman lying fast asleep in the bottom of the cart. A small rum keg on the floor of the vehicle was sufficient to explain her willingness to trust to the sagacity of her beast of burden, and the rest of the load — tobacco, sugar, tea, cotton shirts, and one

or two pairs of duck trousers – made it clear that she was returning from a marketing expedition.

‘We had best waken the old girl,’ suggested Rashleigh, ‘else if she happens to be robbed and it gets known that we passed her on the road, we’re sure to be blamed and possibly punished for it.’

His companion agreed, and Rashleigh, finding shouts failed to penetrate to the depths of her slumber, caught her leg and shook it vigorously. This awakened the woman, who, staring for a few blinking moments at the two travellers, burst out with: ‘Wirrah! wirrah! shpare me life, shpare me life!’

The two men roared with laughter at the ludicrous spectacle she made, lying there with rolling eyes, clinging to the keg with a desperate grip; and it was some moments before they found breath for speech.

‘For the love of the Blessed Vargin, don’t murder me!’ went on the befuddled dame. ‘Take what you want now, and go you your ways.’

After several efforts Rashleigh managed to persuade her that their intentions were entirely friendly.

‘Arrah, thin, what do you want?’ she demanded suspiciously.

‘Nothing but your company to Liverpool,’ answered Rashleigh.

‘By the powers, thin, you shall have that same,’ she said heartily. ‘Get you up now, the pair of ye, and ride in the cart. Woa, Nobby, woa!’ she called to the bullock.

The bullock halted, as it seemed gladly, and the two men climbed into the cart, in which they sat on some sacks which the woman handed to them. She then took a long swig at the keg, and handed it friendlily to Rashleigh, who eagerly tipped it to his mouth. Almost instantly he set the keg down

with a splutter, his throat feeling as though he had swallowed liquid fire, which made the old woman scream with laughter as she asked whether he had never taken a drop of rum before.

'Not that Bengal stuff,' answered Rashleigh pleasantly, 'nor out of so droll a drinking-cup.'

'Aye,' she answered, 'I suppose you'll be being the silver-spoon sort, needing a swell crystal tumbler to drink out of. Here, young man,' she added to Rashleigh's companion, 'you'll have a toast.'

The youngster gladly accepted the invitation and showed signs of enjoyment as he set the keg down after a long swig.

'There's a lad, now, who knows a good drink,' cried the dame approvingly. 'Come on now, Nobby, 'tis almost sundown; pull foot or it's late home we'll be. Come up, Nobby, come up!'

The old bullock mended his pace, and as dusk was settling they jolted into Liverpool.

Liverpool, a town about seven leagues from Sydney on the Great Southern Road of the colony, was founded by Governor Macquarie, who gave it that name in the hope that it would develop into an important centre of commerce. He equipped the town with a fine hospital, a jail, barracks and other public buildings, but failed to take sufficient account of the handicaps of inferior soil and the inadequate supply of fresh water. The George River, which is navigable for shell-boats only up to the town from Botany Bay, certainly passes very near Liverpool, but flows with salt water, being tidal, and the only means which the later inhabitants were able to devise was a dam across the river bed to check the influence of the tides.

Consequently, when the old convict system was abandoned and the Government establishments were withdrawn,

THE MEMOIRS OF

Liverpool sank to the level of a village of the meanest importance, despite the expenditure of large funds in deepening the channel of the river, in the never-realized hope that it might become a port. Liverpool stands as a monument to a governor who was not distinguished for foresight. At the time, however, when Rashleigh first passed through it, there were about fifteen hundred convicts employed by the Government there on various works, and it seemed to him, used for two years to the open spaces of the plains, a bustling place, accentuated by the fact that the workpeople were then just returning to their homes and the convicts to barracks.

'Yerrah, there, Biddy,' cried a man to the old woman, 'and who's thim in the cart wid ye?'

'Shure, and who should they be but my Government men, you spalpeen,' answered the woman with a chuckle: meaning that they were convicts assigned to her service.

'Aisy, now, wid your joking; shure it ain't in airnest she is, young man, is it?' asked the questioner of Rashleigh.

'That's just what we are,' asserted he, entering into the spirit of the joke. 'We're this lady's Government men.'

Giving the curious one no further information, the trio rattled on in the cart through the town, and on into the country, with Biddy regularly stimulating herself with nips from the keg, until at last, and not before every bone in Rashleigh's body was aching with the jolting, she suddenly cried: 'Praise be to the Vargin, I see our lights yonder; we'll soon be home now.'

A few yards on she turned off the road towards a cluster of huts standing in the centre of a large clearing, and was soon surrounded by what seemed like a pack of fifty yelping

curs. The dogs were followed by a group of bare-legged urchins carrying bark torches, who came racing towards the cart with loud cries of welcome, several of them clambering on to the cart for the fun of a ride over the last few yards. As the bullock stopped at the door of a large, rambling hut, Rashleigh made out through the open door several half-savage looking creatures moving about in the light of the fire. He handed the precious keg to Biddy when she had descended from the cart, and loaded her arms with the more valued articles in her load, while the youngsters seized upon the rest and carried them within doors. Vociferous welcome greeted the old woman, followed by questions as to how she had fared at the marketing.

'Why, thin, acushla,' answered the old lady, 'I'm a'most bate and sore wore out wid traivelling; but it's shure no odds now I'm safe home agin wanst more. I sold the corn raking, and I've brought you lashings of tobaccy, and sugar, and a drop of the craythur. But, by the Jakus, it's forgetting I am! Here's two poor travellers, childer, that I fell in wid on the road, and they'll be stopping wid us the night.'

'Cead mille falteagh!' (Welcome, kindly welcome) came in a chorus from the friendly wild folk. 'Draw forrad to the fire,' invited one. 'Supper's been ready this hour, Granny, and awaiting you.'

'Well then, alannah, and I'm ready for it. But where's my ould man?' she asked.

'It was tired he got, and went to bed an hour ago.'

'Poor ould soul,' said Biddy affectionately, 'then I'll take him a drop of the craythur. He'll not mind being wakened for that.'

While she was attending on her husband, the company set out all the tin cups that could be mustered and filled each with a strong peg of spirit.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Now, bhoys and girls,' cried Biddy, as she returned and took up her cup, 'I'm going to give you a sintimint, and bad luck to him as won't drink it. Here's success to Ould Ireland for ever and ever, Amen.'

Rashleigh drank of the raw and burning spirit with the rest, joining in the vociferous shouts of 'Success to Ould Ireland.'

The whole company then fell to upon a plentiful but plain supper, regarding which Biddy said that it was no meal at all since there were no 'spuds to be got in the benighted cullony, bekase they wouldn't grow in id.' It was a fact in those days that potatoes would not grow in New South Wales, owing to lack of proper culture and faulty seed. The fragments of the supper were thrown to the three pigs which roamed at will in the hut, in honour no doubt of the traditional Irish hospitality to swine. There were, besides these snouters, a sick calf in one corner of the great hut, and a mare which had been given the comfort of the place for foaling three months ago, and had since acquired the habit of returning to it at nightfall, accompanied by her offspring, which was allowed to gambol round the supper table in search of titbits. A whole flock of fowl were roosting in the roof, and awoke with loud crowings every time a burst of laughter disturbed them.

As soon as the table was cleared of everything except the rum keg and the tin mugs, pipes were lit and, a few neighbours dropping in, the floor was cleared and the youngsters started a dance which went on for hours to the music of a banged tin. By midnight most of the elders were drunkenly urging on the dancers, who in their turn rested from dancing to indulge as pretty and shameless an orgy of love-making as ever Rashleigh had seen. He kept as sober as he could and pleaded fatigue as an excuse for not joining in the dancing,

and thus became the victim of a prosy old transportee who had taken part in the Irish rebellion of '98. This worthy sat down beside Rashleigh and regaled him with very detailed narratives of his wonderful feats at Vinegar Hill and Enniscorthy, winding up his unwanted entertainment by singing an interminable ballad celebrating the heroisms of those battles, composed in the Irish language of which his listener did not know a word. An accidental interruption saved Rashleigh from having to endure the last verses, as the old fellow suddenly let out a yell that sounded like 'Whoo Shanavest,' and rushed to the end of the hut, where a sudden fight seemed to have begun.

'Whoo Shanavest!'

'Whoo Carwot!'

These were apparently the war-cries of the suddenly contending parties, who — men and women, old and young — were hard at it with buckets, broken stools, sticks and other articles as weapons. Never had Rashleigh witnessed such a scene of abandoned fury, accompanied by the grunted curses of men, the screams of women, and the crying of children, raging and tearing at each other like beings demented. The dogs, excited by the mad battle of their masters, began to carry on a side warfare of their own, while the squeaking of the pigs and the shrill cackling of the fowls eked out a pandemonium which was deafening and terrifying. Gradually the combatants surged out of the hut and went on with the fight in the open, while Rashleigh and the other stranger exchanged comments and questions as to the cause of this unexpected break in the merriment of the evening. Presently the inmates began to straggle back, lamenting over the disorder and ruin of their home, and especially at the sight of the overturned rum keg, a great part of the contents of which had run out on to the floor, where it mingled in an

obscene puddle with the other abominations of this dormitory of beasts and men.

Old Biddy was lying prone in a corner, and one of her sons, after trying to raise her, discovered that her hand was covered with blood.

'Ochone! ochone! Mother darlint,' he cried in a wailing voice, 'tell your own Pat who's been afther killing you, and, by the Jakus, I'll make him smell brimstone in hell, so I will.'

However the blood had come on her hand, there was nothing worse wrong with the old lady but that she was drunk, and as with the efforts of her family to restore her, her consciousness came back, she opened her eyes to a reality she seemed not to recognize.

'Wirrah! wirrah!' she exclaimed. 'Where am I? Shure it's lost and destroyed, kilt and murdered I am, in the ind of me days!'

They asked her who had beaten her, and as she was about to reply, she saw the overturned rum keg. The agility with which she leapt to her feet reassured her distracted children, and in a moment she was drinking heartily from the bung-hole, and mouthing lamentations over the loss of so much good liquor. After the rest of the hut-dwellers had followed her example, every one retired to rest, Rashleigh and his travelling companion being given a straw shakedown on a sheet of bark before the fire.

They were the first to wake next morning, and at once the younger man made a fire, swept up the earthen floor, and tidied up the hut, so that little evidence of last night's battle remained when their hosts arose. Immediately after breakfast, followed by a drop of the craythur at the insistence of Biddy, the two men went on their way, promising to call again if ever they were passing that way.

Their route was towards Campbelltown, and they walked steadily along the road until they reached the cluster of huts which then formed the town, soon after noon. They approached the first public-house, but before going in Rashleigh's companion looked carefully through the window, as if anxious to be sure that there was no one inside whom he did not wish to encounter. Satisfied on this point, he went in with Rashleigh, and joined him in a competition as to who could most quickly drink the greatest quantity of cider. The young man demurred at Rashleigh's invitation to dine there at his expense, asking him instead to accompany him to his sister's place, which was at no great distance and where he would be assured a welcome. Rashleigh at last agreed, and, as the other went out, bought a bottle of rum, as his experience of colonial society made him sure that the spirit would be welcome at any meal.

He followed his companion, who, as he appeared, parted with some women to whom he had been talking, and guided him on the road to his sister's place. After about a mile along a narrow lane running between fields of green maize, he saw, at the edge of a tract of standing timber, as attractive and English-looking a little hut as he had seen since reaching Australia. Although built of the usual bush materials, it was roughcasted with mud and whitewashed, and there was a veranda along the whole of the front, with climbing plants trained around its rough pillars. Unique in his experience also, there was a plot of cultivated flowers. A wave of homesickness assailed Rashleigh at the sight of this gracious reminder of the gentle beauty of the homeland from which he had been exiled for ever, and he understood the note of exultation in his companion's voice as he proudly exclaimed:

'This is my sister's.'

There was a joyous pride in his glance as he waited to hear

Rashleigh praise its uncommon loveliness in a land of starkness, but the stranger was too moved by memories and regrets to be able to do more than nod his head in acknowledgment of the information. The front door being shut, they went round to the back into a spacious yard, carefully and strongly fenced. Through the gate he saw fowls and pigs, and, beyond, a stockyard, with milking-sheds, from which a woman was coming to meet them.

Rashleigh's companion stood silent under the keen scrutiny of the woman.

'What, Jane, is it really you?' exclaimed the latter, and, to Rashleigh's bewilderment, enfolded his companion in her arms.

'Janel' he said, puzzled, and waited for explanations; but the other two, casually inviting him to follow, went into the house talking with animation, and bidding him wait, withdrew into an inner room.

He could only conjecture that his travelling companion had a most unusual name for a man, and that there was a more than normal degree of affection between him and his sister. Everything in this house was unusual. The floor was clean-swept, the rough tables were scoured to the whiteness of milk, the tin pots and pans all shone like polished silver, and the whole interior was spotless with whitewash, and the walls were decorated with freshly-culled bunches of flowering shrubs. It was indeed a contrast with the hut of Biddy's folk which he had left that morning; but his ruminations on the effect of different characters upon identical conditions and circumstances were cut short by the opening of the bedroom door and the appearance of his hostess. She chatted with him on commonplace matters while preparing dinner, and Rashleigh gazed with delight upon the only decent woman with whom he had met since his arrival in

this land of exile. She was about twenty-five, with a very pleasing expression, and her disposition was hospitable. Her dress was simple: a dimity jacket tied close up to the throat left her arms bare from the elbows and fell below the hips, with a blue dungaree skirt, over which she wore a checked apron such as he had seen on countrywomen in England. He sat conscious of a happiness such as he had not known for years, wishing that it had been to this homestead that he had been assigned. Here, he knew, he could have regained his manhood and his self-respect.

Presently another girl came into the room, dressed in much the same fashion as his hostess, and as he rose to greet her, he was amazed to discover that it was his travelling companion. She laughed at the expression on his face, and shook his extended hand.

'You had no idea, then,' she said, 'that your late companion was a woman?'

'Not a suspicion,' answered Rashleigh. 'If I had . . .'

The two sisters burst into peals of laughter at his frank admission, and the elder woman, leaving them to discuss the humour of the situation, went outside and hailed her husband with a loud 'Coo-ee!'

In a few minutes the good man of the house entered, accompanied by a little troop of children, who welcomed their relative and the stranger and went off to wash themselves. The meal to which they sat down consisted of the same food as most of the colonists ate, but it was prepared with that care which bespeaks a gentle character. The pork had been soaked to make it less salty, and the pumpkins, besides having been pared before boiling, had been steamed after they were done: the bread was leavened and baked in a great loaf under an inverted iron pot, making it more palatable as well as more enticing in appearance than

THE MEMOIRS OF

the ordinary 'damper' cooked in the ashes of a wood fire. The clothing of the father and the children revealed the same care and attention for little things which made the difference between this home and those of most of the settlers.

'I thought I saw two men come down the lane,' said the settler, with a twinkle in his eye.

'You did so; but Jane was one of them,' answered his wife with a laugh.

'And how far did you come in that disguise, Jane?' he asked.

'All the way from Parramatta; because I thought it much safer to travel the roads as a man than as a woman, especially on foot and alone,' said Jane, smiling.

'I don't know how anybody could be deceived by your soft baby face. I am sure I should spot you for a woman in any disguise.'

Jane just laughed at his certainty, and winked at her sister; and, dinner ending then, Rashleigh apologetically produced his secret bottle of rum. His host at first declined to take any, but on Jane joining Rashleigh in pressing him, he agreed on the condition that his eldest son should run into Campbelltown for another bottle, so that they should not feel that they were being entertained entirely at the stranger's expense. The children were then sent about their chores upon the farm, and the four adults sat in to a game of cards with the grog beside them for a couple of hours. By this time the sisters had wearied of the game and retired for a rest on their beds, and shortly afterwards, at Rashleigh's suggestion, the two men set out to look round the farm.

The note of care and self-respect which had so struck Rashleigh indoors was noticeable in the excellent condition

of the fences, the well-cleared condition of the expertly tilled land, the whole of which did not exceed fifty acres. As they strolled around, the settler told his guest that he had been free about two years and that the whole period of his sentence had been spent in the service of a rich settler near Campbelltown, for whom he had acted as working overseer for two years, and that he had married while still a prisoner. His good conduct had won him a ticket-of-leave, but he had preferred to stay on with his master until he was altogether free. When this long-anticipated event occurred and he received his certificate of release, he looked about for a piece of land which would be a good investment for his own and his wife's savings, and had so come upon this place, which was owned by a military officer abroad with his regiment, for whom a Sydney merchant acted as agent. His first arrangement with the agent had been for a seven years' lease of the entire farm of over twelve hundred acres, upon the condition that he should clear fifty acres, and yield it up well fenced and cultivated at the end of the term if required to do so; but quite recently the lease had been extended to fourteen years, provided the settler cleared a further fifty acres. He was therefore looking forward to twelve prosperous years of husbandry, at the end of which he hoped to be able to purchase a small farm of his own. He told Rashleigh of the stern and unremitting labour that had been the lot of himself and his loyal wife in felling, stumping and burning off the land, and the convict had no difficulty in appreciating the task of the industrious couple, from his personal knowledge of such labour on Emu Plains. It was good to hear the fervent tribute which the man paid to his wife, and his gratitude to his old master who had lent him oxen to yoke to their plough, thus saving them the heart-breaking effort of breaking the land by more primitive methods.

THE MEMOIRS OF

They came to a stretch of fertile lowland under tobacco, on which the children were working with small hoes to keep down the weeds between the rows. Both men took a hoe and gave the children a spell, and after they had been working for a while one of the youngsters called to the settler that there was a gentleman waiting at the fence. As they looked up the man came towards them. He was dressed in a grey shooting-coat, white trousers and a decent black hat. He saluted them both courteously, and inquired whether one Robert Marshall lived thereabouts.

'I am Robert Marshall,' said the settler.

'Oh, then,' said the stranger, 'Mr. Hammell, of Campbelltown, told me you'd got some fat pigs to sell, and I am buying pigs.'

'Well,' answered Marshall, 'it's true I did think of selling some of them, but I've been thinking I'll maybe need the meat for my own use. How many would you be wanting?'

'I want a score or two if I can get them,' replied the other, rattling the loose coins in his trousers pockets.

Rashleigh had been eyeing the stranger with a feeling that he had seen his face before, when his uncertainty disappeared and he was on the point of bursting into a laugh, but a glance from the stranger checked him, as Marshall began to lead them towards the house. The settler called his wife and went aside to confer with her privately about the feasibility of the proposed sale, while Rashleigh whispered in the stranger's ear:

'Aha, Miss Jane, you don't catch me twice,' he said with a laugh. 'I knew at once it was you.'

She gave him a roguish smile: 'Hush!' she warned him, 'we're goin' to have some fun with Bob.'

She turned to meet husband and wife as they came up, and

went with the man over to the sties, where she listened attentively to his discourse on the fine quality of the animals, and after some chaffering, struck a bargain. All four then adjourned to the house, where Rashleigh was invited to draw up the necessary document of sale. He sat down to the table and after a moment asked the buyer's name. The soi-disant pig merchant looked archly at Marshall as she answered: 'My name — why, what should it be but Jane Bates?'

The long-suppressed laughter of the other three broke out at last, and the discomfited settler playfully knocked off his sister-in-law's hat, causing her luxuriant hair to fall about her laughing face.

'Well, you certainly took me in,' said the settler, joining in the laugh against himself. 'But what beats me is how I failed to recognize my own best clothes, even though I have only worn them two or three times.'

After supper that evening the men and women drew up to the fire with a glass of grog for a spell of talk, and Rashleigh was astonished to find that Jane had only recently become free out of the Female Factory at Parramatta, where all unassigned female convicts were kept at labour. He listened with interest to the girl's stories of the life and inmates of that institution for the reclamation of the untender members of her sex.

It appeared that the quality of food rationed out to the women convicts was in no way better than that of the men's, and Jane gave an instance of the methods which the inmates of the factory were prepared to use when they seriously objected to the poorness of their fare. A sort of porridge, called hominy, made from boiled Indian corn-meal had been issued as a substitute for more palatable food, and had caused noisy discontent among the prisoners, which discontent the Governor learnt about when, on the Sydney race-course,

THE MEMOIRS OF

someone drew his attention to an inscription which had been surreptitiously plastered on the side of his carriage:

THIS YEAR HIS OMMANY TOMS DRAG:

LORD SEND IT DRAG 'IM TO 'ELL.

The Governor offered a reward of fifty pounds for the discovery of the offender who had thus made of him a laughing-stock, and made further efforts to the same end by distributing a few thousand lashes upon the backs of the male convicts; but the perpetrator of the insulting protest against the vile hominy was never discovered.

The female convicts took the straighter course of open rebellion the first day on which the hominy was served out, and resolutely and unanimously refused to eat so much as a mouthful between them. The officials, at a loss as to how to deal with such a concerted revolt, summoned one of the most active of the magistrates, a clergyman, very short and fat, and generally a figure inviting the derision of the type of women whom he had come to placate.

'You should have heard him trying to reason with us,' said Jane with a reminiscent laugh. 'He began by telling us how surprised he was that anyone should refuse to eat the excellent homlmy, stating that he frequently ate it with relish himself. Then one of the roughest and boldest of the prisoners, swearing dreadfully, told him that he was a liar, because he could never have grown such a huge belly as he carried in front of him, on such stuff. You can guess how we all laughed at her daring, but worse – or better – was to come. Snatching up a small kit filled with hominy, she turned to the rest of us with, 'As he's so fond of the muck, in the devil's name let him have plenty of it!' and with that she overturned the kit on the man's head, ramming it down with a blow of her fist. Pandemonium broke loose, I can

tell you. The clergyman, squealing with the pain of the hot porridge and fighting to get the tight-fitting pannikin off his head: the matron and her toadies dashing in amongst us with busy clawing hands in their effort to rescue the fellow from the wilder women! I tell you it was frightful. In the end the convicts overpowered the matron and the other officials, made each of them swallow as much hominy as would suffice six women, and cut the hair of every one of them as short as a friar's.'

'What,' cried Marshall, 'you mean to tell us that they cut off the hair of the officials! Whatever made them think of such a thing?'

'Why, yes, they did,' answered Jane, whose eyes were bright at the recollection. 'You see, the matron had recently herself recommended and had had adopted a suggestion for the cutting off of hair as a punishment for incorrigibles¹; and they simply decided to give her a taste of her own medicine.'

'And what happened after?' asked her sister.

'Oh, that was the funniest thing of all. They called out the soldiers to keep the women within bounds until they could get hold of the ringleaders before they made their escape. But it was an Irish regiment that they called on, and the soldiers simply grounded arms, saying they would sooner kiss the darlints than obey the order to charge. So the ringleaders got away for long enough to make it difficult to say which of the women had been most active in the revolt.'

They listened to her further revelations of the life she had so recently left until, at a late hour, they turned in for the night, Rashleigh enjoying the luxury of a comfortable bed and a sleep between clean sheets for the first time since he had left Sydney as a political agitator.

¹ This punishment is confirmed by James Mudie, of Castle Forbes, N.S.W., in evidence before the Select Committee on Transportation, 1837.

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

In the morning, declining to wait for the breakfast which Marshall hospitably offered, he took his leave of the people who had given him the only really happy day since he had come to Australia, promising to call and see them if ever he could get leave from the unknown master to whom he had been assigned. Before he was out of sight of the comely homestead, he paused and looked long upon its typical English beauty, and went on his way a prey to the torment of the might-have-been.

CHAPTER XII

As he walked back on his yesterday's tracks towards Campbelltown, he wondered whether the teasing hope that had come to his mind, that Mr. Arlack's home would be like the one he had just left, would be realized. He dared not let the expectation get hold of his imagination, for he knew too well how roughly the average lower-class Australian settler was content to live, but, while he was eating his breakfast in a small public-house in Campbelltown, he toyed with the idea that his luck might hold even to this relative miracle. When he had finished his meal, he went up to a group of idlers playing quoits, and asked them to direct him to Mr. Arlack's.

'Mr. Arlack's!' answered one of the men in a tone of contempt. 'I never knowed he had got a handle to his name afore. What do you think,' he called to his companions; 'here's a cove wants to find out Mister Arlack's. Ain't that a good 'un?'

After the laughter which greeted this remark had subsided, the speaker asked Rashleigh how long he had been in the colony.

'About two years and a half,' he answered.

'As green as that still, eh?' went on the speaker. 'Let me tell you that Lunnon Bob is the name we gives to your Mr. Arlack. What do you want with him, anyhow, mate?'

'Why, I'm assigned to him,' answered Rashleigh.

'Assigned to him, are you!' said the man. 'Let's have a look at your teeth.' As the new-comer innocently opened his mouth, the man looked at his teeth and added: 'You'd best knock half of them grinders of yours clean out of your head, for all the need you'll have of them at Lunnon Bob's: and I tell you Polly Arlack will hate you like hell at sight of them,

and swear that you have come to eat her out of house and home.'

Rashleigh saw clearly from this talk that there was nothing enviable about the place to which he was assigned, and was about to leave the group of jeering fellows, when one of them offered him a drink out of a mug he held out to him.

'Don't take it too serious,' he said in a friendly tone, 'it isn't quite as bad as they make out. Take a drop of this, for of that you won't have the chance again very soon. Now, you see them slip rails? Well, you must turn down a road that leads through them until you come to a farm you'll see in a cleared bottom. Inquire there and they will tell you the way to Bob's.'

Rashleigh took a swig at the mug and, thanking the man, managed to find his way to Bob Arlack's farm. Even at a first glance he realized how fantastic had been his hope of the morning. In one corner about ten acres of straggling maize was striving to hold its own with the weeds which grew more plentifully than the grain, and it seemed that the rest of the cleared land had been given over entirely to the weeds. The fencing of the paddock was in the last stage of disrepair, and could no longer serve to keep out animal or beast. Rashleigh, full of misgiving, made his way down a narrow path towards the cluster of huts at the farther end of the clearing, and his drooping spirits sank lower at a nearer view of his new home.

The principal dwelling of the Arlacks touched the nadir of even Australian architecture of that day, in sheer ugliness and shapelessness. Crude props shored up the leaning walls, gaping holes showed in the barked roof, and the walls were unsightly with gaps between the timbers, half-stopped up with dirty plaster and mud.

As he reached the threshold a flock of scraggy fowls flut-

tered out of the house past his head. At first he was uncertain whether the human being whom he saw standing in the gloom of the hut was man or woman, so quaintly and filthily was she dressed, and so tangled and matted was her hair under a man's tattered hat; but as his eyes grew accustomed to the half-light, he saw that she was wearing a petticoat. A more repulsive member of her sex he had never seen, but he discreetly addressed her with courtesy.

'Pray, ma'am, is Mr. Arlack at home?'

'He'll be here just now,' she answered surlily. 'What do you want with him?'

'Why, ma'am, I'm assigned to him from Emu Plains.'

'Oh, so you're the new Government man! Sit down and rest yourself,' she said, and turned away to continue whatever had been her occupation amongst the disorder.

Whilst he sat waiting for whatever should happen next, he took stock of the woman who was to share with Arlack the ordering of his future existence. She was a thin woman above middle height, and the most noticeable features were her small green eyes set cavernously deep in their sockets, beneath dirty flaxen eyebrows of unusual thickness. Her irregular long nose resembled more than any other thing the broken bill of a cockatoo. Her complexion was dirt-coloured, and her voice a queer mixture of a growl and a squawk. The foulness of her person and clothes, neither of which seemed ever to have been washed, was reflected in the condition of the hut, which contained a simple chaos of everything that a house could contain. The floor was fouled with chicken's dung, with puddles of noxious water in every hollow. Fleas held carnival on the floor and clouds of humming flies revelled in the air. Rashleigh sat overwhelmed by the sordidness of the scene, when suddenly a pot on the fire, near which he was sitting, boiled over.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'What in hell are you gaping at, you scum?' squawked his new mistress. 'Why don't you take the blasted pot off?'

'You'd better look a little sharp here,' she added, as he hastened to do her bidding. 'We've got no use for sleepy-going coves about this farm.'

When presently Bob Arlack appeared at the doorway, Rashleigh saw that he was as sordid and abandoned as his wife.

'Here, Bob, is the new Government man for you,' said the woman, handing her husband the pass which Rashleigh had given her on his arrival.

The man made a pretence of reading the pass, and, watching him, Rashleigh wondered how two such human gargoyles could ever have come together. The man's tongue hung out of the widest mouth he had ever seen, his eyes squinted terribly, and his seamed and furrowed face was pitted with the ravages of smallpox. He turned upon Rashleigh with a bullying air.

'Well, and why didn't you get 'ere sooner, eh?' he demanded truculently. 'You've took too long coming.'

'I'm not a very good hand at walking,' answered Rashleigh; 'but I did not waste any time on the road.'

'Um! perhaps not. Anyways I won't take any further notice of this breach. Sally, did you give him his mess?'

'No, I didn't. I thought there was time enough,' answered his wife.

'Well, give it to him now, and let him go to his hut,' ordered the master of the place.

'What are you going to put your mess in?' she demanded.

'Well, I don't know,' replied Rashleigh, 'unless you may be kind enough to lend me a bag.'

'Lend you a bag, indeed! A fine pass I must have come to if I've to make bags for Government men,' she said in a tone

by which she meant to remind the convict of the social chasm between herself and him.

'Very well, ma'am,' answered Rashleigh mildly, 'I'll put it in my handkerchief and hat.'

She thereupon measured out for him an exact quart of maize and gave him four pounds of salt pork.

'There, now, there's your week's mess. You can come to me this day week for more,' she said. 'And there's your hut,' she added, pointing to a hut which stood beyond three small hayricks.

Rashleigh went towards the desolate and neglected-looking place in which he was to live during his assignment to Arlack, and found upon entering it that there was to be no improvement here upon the conditions which he had so recently left on Emu Plains. It contained two rough sleeping berths of bark, two blocks of wood to serve as seats, and some pieces of broken iron pots by way of furniture. There were some rough rags hanging on a fence opposite the door which had once been blankets and were obviously intended to serve him for bed-covering. After one comprehensive glance round the forbidding place, he went to the steel mill and ground up his pittance of maize, a task which occupied him until sunset. Returning to the hut, he gathered some wood and made a fire, and then set to with a broom improvised from well-leaved boughs, to sweep the filthy floor and, while he was doing this, his future companion came into the hut, carrying a calabash full of water. He was as gaunt and woebegone a wretch as Rashleigh had seen since coming to the colony, and was in a state of extreme emaciation. A glimmer of interest came to his rheumy eyes at sight of the new-comer.

'Well, mate,' he said in a melancholy voice, 'so you've come home, I see.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Aye,' replied Rashleigh, 'and a pretty home it is to come to. Of all the rat-holes!'

The other shrugged with the hopeless gesture of one who had long ceased to complain of the inevitable, slouched out to bring in his tattered bedclothes, and set about preparing a mean meal of hominy. Rashleigh followed his example, and the two outcasts sat down and ate their meagre food without any seasoning. When they had finished, the older hand took out some loose dried leaves of bush tobacco.

'Have some?' he asked, offering the weed. 'My name's Jem.'

Rashleigh declined the offer, and Jem, without comment, filled his pipe and smoked on in silence for some time.

'Got a blanket yet?' he asked suddenly. 'No? Then you'd best go up to the house and ask for one.'

'Suppose I had,' answered the new-comer, and went up to the house, to be greeted with curses as a damned nuisance by Arlack, and receiving a worn and tattered rag, such as he had seen on the fence, from the fellow's wife. With a sigh at the sudden memory of the clean and comfortable bed in which he slept last night, he went back to the hut and made the best of a shakedown of straw. He slept soundly in spite of the roughness of his couch, and only awakened when his hut mate shook him vigorously by the shoulder.

'Get up quick,' the man said, a note of alarm in his voice. 'The laughing jackasses have been crying this long while.'

Rashleigh at once tumbled out of bed, and began hastily to clothe himself, and before he was fully dressed Arlack appeared in the doorway.

'Hey! you pair of bloody hangabouts,' he yelled, 'd'you mean to stay ther' all the damned day? As for you, my fine swell,' he added, turning to Rashleigh, 'don't go getting it into your head that you're going to do as you like here.'

You'd better learn to brighten your lamps betimes, or I'll try what a good flogging will do to waken you up. As for you, Jem, you ort to know better. How d'you think I'm going to keep you in vittles, if you lie there stinking till all hours of the morning, eh?'

'Why, Bob,' answered Jem, in a conciliatory tone, 'I must a' overslept meself, and this young feller was natur'ly tired after his journey.'

'Bob, indeed!' shouted the other, bridling at the old hand's familiarity before the new man. 'Mr. Arlack, or Master at least, it's got to be in your mouth, and don't you forget it. D'you think I went all through the misery of lagging, to be Bobbed by you, now I have got my freedom?'

Still growling his displeasure, he led them to the house and handed to each an out-size hoe: 'There, Jem,' he said, 'you know the new ground; go there and pitch into it with your new mate, and I'll be down presently.'

They trudged to a distant part of the farm, where a tract had recently been cleared of timber, and Jem explained that they each had to get to work on a separate section, as Bob Arlack always measured the amount of ground broken by each, the settler always insisting upon each Government man in his employ doing the full allotted task of thirteen superficial rods, two spits deep, per day. This scheduled measurement was based upon what could be done on normally moist soil, but the land on which these two men were put was so hard that the hoe rebounded from the surface more often than it penetrated. Rashleigh assumed that his lack of skill would be made good by use to the new job, and wrought with a will, in the hope of developing dexterity in this task which, by the time they went to the hut for breakfast, had him bathed in sweat. Soon after they had resumed work, Arlack came to inspect, and seeing how

smalla space he had broken, began at once to abuse Rashleigh.

'You don't get the laugh of me that way,' he said threateningly. 'If you haven't done every inch of your job by sundown, you will go to court and find out that there was no gammon about Bob Arlack.'

As the day went on he began to wish himself back at Emu Plains. The work was heart-breaking and back-breaking, and during the last two hours he plied his hoe to the accompaniment of sneers and curses from his employer; but managed to get his portion of land broken a few minutes after sunset, without having once given way to the temptation to fling insolent answers in the teeth of his tormenter. His job done, aching in every inch of his body, he crawled over to his hut, dropped on to his bed and, without even troubling to prepare any food, slept until morning.

Arlack was typical of a large class of settlers in New South Wales at that time. To him a Government servant was simply a slave, a mechanism for making money by means of merciless overworking. If any man broke down physically under the strain of the often too heavy and unaccustomed work, they simply returned the weaklings to establishment, and took new ones in exchange. It was only recently that Sir R. Darling, the then Governor, had introduced regulations to compel the supply to the convicts of an equitable quantity of food and clothing, and even so a common system of evasion was practised by the settlers, against which the victims had practically no appeal or recourse. They were mostly half-starved, spirit-broken wretches who were as likely to receive punishment as incorrigibles or crawlers if they applied for relief to the magistrates; and even if they happened to win an appeal against a master, he was always able by renewed cruelty to make them regret their success.

The majority of the settlers were time-expired convicts who had themselves suffered from the treatment, and by that curious twist in human nature, they mostly took pleasure in visiting the same hardships as they had endured upon the unfortunate men who were assigned to them. They were a rapacious class, but lacking in that self-control which is essential for the building of a fortune upon small beginnings, and the profits of the harvest were as often as not dissipated in a burst of debauchery which left them penniless for the rest of the year. It was an almost normal condition for settler, family and assigned men to live for over half the year on maize and a small ration of pork. Against all the ill-treatment and hardship there was only the magistrates' court from which to seek relief and protection, but as the magistrates were to a man employers of assigned convicts, their interest was so naturally the maintenance of the most stringent system of discipline and subordination, that the aggrieved men were practically helpless. As a matter of course the type of convict who had by reason of his especially evil character become camp constable, overseer, and other petty official, pursued a similar course when he became free by creeping by devious methods on to the bench of magistrates, there to exercise his tyranny in new and more powerful ways. At this period the position of men in the circumstances of Ralph Rashleigh was as hopeless as it could be.

It was not long before Rashleigh was broken to the tough labour with the hoe, and though his muscles were hardened by the strain, he was tormented by hunger and sought ways and means of adding to his meagre ration. The old trick of grating corn to meal which he had learnt on the plains did not satisfy him. He wanted more meat, and contrived to get it by trapping stealthily occasional fowls from Mrs. Arlack's

stock. The woman soon noticed this thinning of her flock, and for want of any other explanation, straightly charged her Government men with stealing them. One night, just as Rashleigh had finished boiling two young ducklings, he looked from the pot and saw his task-mistress on her way to the hut. He managed to snatch the birds out of the water and secrete them in a hole in the floor which he had dug in anticipation of just such an emergency, when in she came, red with anger at the appetizing smell which all his quickness had been unable to cope with. She accused him of stealing the birds in language which shocked even his hardened ears, but he answered by inviting her to search the hut. She did so, but failed to find any trace of the ducks, except the steaming water in the pot in which they had been boiled. She went back to the house fuming with rage at having been checkmated, and vowing that she would nail the crime on to him yet.

Thereafter Rashleigh abandoned the hut as a cookhouse, but continued to purloin birds whenever he could safely trap them, resorting to the bushman's method of cooking. He lighted fires in secluded parts of the bush, and, after they had burned down to a red glow, enveloped the birds in tempered clay, without removing the feathers or entrails, covering the whole mass with hot ashes, and leaving it until the casing had hardened, by which time the food was done to a turn. On opening birds cooked in this fashion, the entrails fall out in a lump, leaving the flesh clean and wholesome.

He was stealing the fowls with the carelessness of desperation, content to take the risks so long as he managed to get enough to eat, and recked nothing of the scowls of Mrs. Arlack as she watched her poultry diminishing. He had come to that state of mind common to every convict whose

spirit had not been entirely subjugated to despair, and spent long hours in the evenings, after work, cudgelling his brains for some safe plan of escape. He was thus occupied one evening when he slowly realized that the unaccustomed sound near his ear was of someone breathing, and turning suddenly, he saw in the glow of the fire what was unmistakably a pair of sparkling eyes peeping through one of the many chinks in the wall. After some minutes he rose, stretched himself and went to bed, and was soon snoring more loudly than was his wont. His ruse worked, and presently Mrs. Arlack came stealthily into the hut, which she searched very thoroughly in her hope of finding the bones of the birds which she was certain Rashleigh had stolen. He began then to feign talking in his sleep, proceeding through incoherent mutterings to quite distinct words: 'Two last night; two more to-night, feathers and all. That old goose, too' — a loud snore — 'feathers and all, feathers and all.'

He was watching her out of the slit of one eye, and saw her raise her clenched fists above her head as if she would strike him. She seemed, suddenly, to think better of her intention, and withdrew precipitately from the hut. Rashleigh then fell asleep in the warmth of the piled fire, but stirred awake during the night, unable to recollect what had awakened him. As his eyes roamed around the hut walls, he saw, in the light of the fire, the pattern of his mistress's plaid cloak filling part of one of the wide gaps between the slabs of the wall. Rashleigh rose and, going over to the fireplace, pretended to stumble against a simmering pot of water which still rested on the burning logs. With an angry curse he lifted the pot and flung its contents full against the part of the wall where the plaid was showing. A shriek told him that his eyes had not betrayed him, and rushing out of the hut, he

THE MEMOIRS OF

ran into Mrs. Arlack, who greeted him with a stream of foul oaths, swearing that he had scalded her to death.

'If there is law or justice in New South Wales,' she shouted, 'I'll have you hanged for this.'

As Rashleigh, secretly jubilant at having got even for once with the cruel creature, was pretending to commiserate with her, Arlack himself came running from the house in his shirt, and swinging a great axe, which he flung at Rashleigh without warning. The axe went slightly wide, and the settler came on in a bellowing rush, holding his head low before his crouched body. Rashleigh brought his knee up into his face, and plugged him behind the ear with a blow which stretched him senseless. Screeching like a fury, his wife seized the axe, but before she could strike, Rashleigh closed with her, and wresting it from her hands, pushed her backwards on top of her husband. Without waiting further, he rushed into his hut with the axe, making fast the door.

He heard the discomfited couple withdraw amid a storm of threats and curses, and listened with real misgiving to their assertion that they would have him hanged for attempted murder next day. He realized that he was in the most dangerous fix that he had ever been since he started uttering spurious coins, and his brain worked swiftly. His only hope was to anticipate his tyrannical employers by getting his story in first. He dressed immediately and set off at once for the house of the district constable, eight miles distant, where he gave his version of the affair and begged official protection from the murderous brutality of the Arlacks. He handed the axe to the constable, and showed his torn face and clothing as evidence of the truth of what he said. It happened, fortunately for Rashleigh, that the official was in need of the services of a man for work of his own for a few

days, and that he had a private though undisclosed hatred of the Arlacks. He therefore gave him a considerate hearing, and locked him up in an adjoining room.

An hour after sunrise Bob Arlack arrived, and through a crack in the wall Rashleigh heard his highly-coloured and truthless account of the episode. The constable's answering speech left no doubt in the listener's mind as to the side on which his sympathies leaned.

'Well,' Rashleigh heard him say, 'there's nothing like hearing both sides of a story. I have heard your man's, for he has been here this three hours – and now I've heard yours. I expect the magistrates will have to settle between you, but I'll just tell you my private opinion, and that is that you are both a liar and a rascal, and your wife a damned sight worse than you. I've had my eye on the pair of you this long time, and I mean to let the magistrates know how you goes on with your men.'

For a moment Arlack was taken aback, but his native impudence quickly reasserted itself.

'Well, and I'd like to know what business of yours it is, how we use our Government men,' he said truculently. 'You'd better watch your step, Mr. Constable, or I'll be putting a lever under you that'll hoist you flying out of your billet.'

'Be off with you,' shouted the enraged constable; 'and don't you come here a-threatening me in the execution of my duty, or I'll find a shop for you, free as you are.'

Soon after the departure of Arlack, the door of the room in which Rashleigh was confined was unlocked, and the constable let him out.

'As you'll be here a week now before the court sits, you might as well give me a bit of help on my ground. I'll find you summat to eat for your trouble, and that'll be better than

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

sitting around in the room on dry bread, which is the Government allowance for prisoners awaiting trial.'

Rashleigh was, of course, glad to fall in with the suggestion, and after a hearty breakfast they went off together to burn off some timber. Another constable came up about noon, and after consulting with him, Rashleigh's companion left him to continue the work alone.

Shortly after sunset the district constable returned with his brother officer, bringing with them a prisoner. Rashleigh came in from work to find the policemen in high glee, and gathered from their conversation that they anticipated a large monetary reward. Also he noticed they had brought with them a supply of spirits, for his guardian gave him a tot before locking him up for the night.

CHAPTER XIII

THE only light in the lock-up came through the chinks in the wall from the adjoining room, and when his eyes had accustomed themselves to the gloom, Rashleigh made out the form of a tall, powerfully-built man lying in an opossum rug on the floor. The prisoner made no reply to his salutations, and resisted all his efforts to draw him into talk, until Rashleigh lighted a pipe. Then the man sat up and asked for a fill of tobacco, as he, being handcuffed, was unable to get at his smoking equipment himself.

When his pipe was well alight the stranger abandoned his very reserved manner, smiling grimly as he nodded towards the wall, behind which his captors were making merry on the spirits which they had brought for the celebration of their capture.

'Aye, booze away, my boys!' he said sardonically. 'You think you've done a mighty clever thing; but my turn is coming again a damned sight sooner than you guess!'

It was already obvious to Rashleigh from what he had overheard that this was no ordinary prisoner, but the answers to the questions which he put to the man were met evasively; and finding that the fellow's taciturnity had returned as a result of these inquiries, he made himself as comfortable as he could and went to sleep, congratulating himself on being even for a few days free from the horrors of the Arlack homestead. He seemed to have been asleep for some hours, when he was awakened by a rough shaking and someone saying, 'Get up and come along!' Still dazed with sleep, the only thing he noticed at first was that the door of the lock-up was open, and that the tall figure of his fellow-prisoner was walking towards it. He sprang up and began to dress himself, but before he had finished the man reappeared.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'Why in hell don't you make haste? Come on, quick!'

There was a threat in the voice that made Rashleigh pick up his jacket and hurry into the adjoining room, where he found half a dozen roughly dressed men, fully armed, and the two constables fast in a drunken slumber, their heads lying on their arms on the table.

'Now,' said one of the men in a voice which Rashleigh recognized as that of his companion, 'get some fire-sticks. We'll set fire to the hut and burn it, and these blasted dogs, together.'

The new-comers, with cries of assent, set about obeying their leader's order, while Rashleigh looked on in horror.

'For God's sake,' he interposed, 'don't be such fools as to burn them. You can make a safe get-away without murder. They won't wake to give the alarm for hours.'

'Hold your damned tongue,' rasped the leader, swinging round on him threateningly, 'or we'll handcuff you and throw you neck and crop into the fire and roast you like a snake in a log.'

Ralph's reply was cut short by the man clapping a hand over his mouth and running him easily out of the hut with the other. He was trundled along for a short distance, and then the two of them turned to watch the flames rapidly blaze round the lock-up. All his hard experiences had not calloused Rashleigh's heart, and he turned sick as his imagination pictured the two constables waking to find themselves trapped in a roaring furnace. He could only hope that a door or a window-shutter had been left unfastened; but the same thought also occurred to his captor.

'Has anyone fastened the jigger and jumps (door and windows)?' he called to the men near the blazing pile.

'Yes, I did,' answered one of them. 'I took care to

see that there wasn't a single hole for the swine to crawl through.'

Rashleigh began to plead and protest, but was cut short by maledictions. 'At least,' he persisted, 'save the woman and children. The constable's wife and children are upstairs.'

'Now, by hell and the Devil,' roared the leader, pressing a cocked pistol against Rashleigh's ear, 'if you so much as whisper again, I'll blow out your blasted brains!'

There was a determination on the ruffian's ferocious face, clearly outlined in the light of the fire, that persuaded Rashleigh that it was no empty threat, and he could only stand by wringing his hands in agony. The thatch of the roof was already burned clean out, and the roof-tree timbers were a pattern of licking flames, but still there was no sign of the slumbering inmates. Perhaps the constables, deep in intoxicated sleep, had been suffocated in their sleep without regaining consciousness – but what of the mother and her children? He prayed fiercely that the same easier death might have overcome them, when suddenly the blazing roof collapsed, falling into the room in which they were sleeping, sending a fountain of sparks and small embers soaring skywards.

A woman's scream, high-pitched and terrified, ripped through the quiet of the night, followed immediately by the wailing shrieks of little children, and the yells of the trapped men. Rashleigh saw the forms of both men outlined against the flames as they struggled to break out, and, careless now of threats and personal safety, he rushed forward to their help. As he ran, a window-shutter was burst open and one of the constables jumped through, and as he touched ground five guns were discharged, and, just before he fell unconscious from a thudding blow on the back of the head, Rashleigh saw the figure leap convulsively and fall back dead.

THE MEMOIRS OF

He came to his senses with a consciousness of a throbbing head and a body aching in every bone, but when he tried to rise, he found that he was securely tied down to the ground. His struggles attracted the attention of a guard.

'Lie still and be damned to you,' said a menacing voice, 'or you'll get another sock over the head that'll stop you waking for ever!'

It was futile to struggle in any case, so he lay still until dawn, when he saw the desperadoes of the night sprawled around him on the ground under an overhanging rock. They slept late into the morning, when some of the men rose and prepared a breakfast of tea, broiled meat and dough-cakes, which they cooked on the spot. When the meal was ready the whole gang of seven gathered round the fire, and for the first time since they had so terribly intruded into his life Rashleigh had an opportunity of observing them. They looked as tough a gang of blackguards as could be found even in a country largely populated by bound and free criminals. Some of them still wore their tattered convict dress, and the others wore an assortment of clothing which could only have been stolen piecemeal. Their method of living thus in the bush, the foul crime of last night, and their fully-armed state, left no doubt in Rashleigh's mind but that he had fallen in with one of those bands of bushrangers which for so long were the terror of decent folk throughout New South Wales. Why, he wondered, had they troubled to bring him away with them? Why had not they killed him out of hand, and thus prevented him for ever from playing the informer, which was obviously their only danger from him? No one spoke to him, and he dared not address them, since he had learnt during that night of tragic phantasmagoria that unasked speech was indiscreet. Once they had finished breakfast he was not left longer in doubts as to their intentions.

RALPH RASHLEIGH

A bushranger came over and freed him from his tight bonds, and led him over to the leader, who was seated on a mound at the entrance of the cavern which was hollowed under the great rock.

Rashleigh looked the man over, and understood why he of them all was the leader. Physically he towered above his companions, and there was that about him which told unmistakably of grim strength of purpose matching the physical power of his great frame. He carried two large pistols in his belt, which he fingered as his captive approached.

'Stand off, and don't come any closer!' he said, with a rasp in his tone. 'What were you in the lock-up for?'

'I gave myself up to complain of my master.'

'Oh, you're the complaining sort, are you!' sneered the other. 'Who was your master?'

'One Bob Arlack, of Airds,' answered Rashleigh.

'Well, and what did he do to you?'

'He wanted to starve me to death and work the flesh off my bones.'

The bushranger looked him over contemptuously: 'Then why the devil didn't you knock his brains in and take to the bush?' he demanded. 'Wouldn't you like to be revenged on him?'

'Why, yes, I would,' answered Rashleigh, 'if it could be done without murdering him and his family.'

'Murder be blowed!' retorted the other. 'If it was me, I'd set fire to the old brute's place and burn him and his as easy as kiss my hand. What's the good of driven devils like us being soft? Murder! Why, it's nothing but simple justice.'

The bitterness that lay behind his words was terrible, and Rashleigh, remembering last night's horror, was glad that he was not marked down for this brute's revenge. The recol-

THE MEMOIRS OF

lection of the night was so vivid that he seemed again to hear the piercing shrieks of the mother and children, and see the shuddering convulsions of the shot constable as he fell in flames, and a violent fit of trembling overcame him so that he literally shook before the bushranger.

'You chicken-hearted, crawling fool!' he said sneeringly. 'I can see that you're the sort that would stand for anything and be anybody's foot-mat, rather than stand up for your rights like a real man. Pah! you weren't worth saving. I wish I'd left you in the lock-up to burn. Supposing we were taken, you're just the sort to get us all hung.'

'Ain't that what I said?' interposed one of the gang, named O'Leary. 'I say he's too much of a cur to be safe for us alive.'

'Let's knock him over the head and be done with him,' said another; and it was clear from the threatening expressions of the rest of the gang, and the way they handled their weapons, that the majority favoured the sentiment of the last speaker.

'Silence!' roared the leader commandingly. 'I'll not have him hurt. That's flat. We want someone to carry our swag and cook our grub, for you all grumble like hell at having to take your turns. That's what he shall do; and it will be strange if seven men can't manage to watch one. And,' he added, with a meaning look at his prisoner, 'at the first sign of anything like treachery, he shall die like a dog, if he were twenty times my own father. That's our way with traitors in this gang, and don't forget it.'

Rashleigh was then allowed to get a bite of breakfast, and in a very short time the bushrangers, with the prisoner carrying the heaviest load, broke camp and set off. Before departing, Foxley, the leader, set a man to guard him, and appointed another to watch him at night, explaining that the

guards would be changed so that all the six men should have him in charge in turn. The gang travelled in a disorderly group, making no pretence of going silently, as if they had no fear of being interfered with in this rough country, over broken ranges through which they tramped until nightfall, when they made a fire beside a running creek. Ralph at once set about preparing a meal, and while they were eating the talk turned upon their recent crimes. It was clear from the snatches of conversation which Rashleigh was able to overhear that all the occupants of the district constable's hut had been done to death, the second man having also jumped from the window, only to meet his death from a volley, as had his comrade. Both bodies had, apparently, been flung back into the fire. The woman and children had been unable to get out of the flaming trap, and it was callously surmised that they had all been burnt to death, as two of the gang had stood by until the place was a heap of smoking ruins. While ruminating on the incredible depths of cruelty to which men could sink, Rashleigh was sharply ordered to prepare some dough and bake it in the ashes of the fire. As he opened the flour-bag, Foxley remarked that the supply was getting low, but that it was not important, as they would very soon replenish it. From this and other remarks he gathered that some new depredation was imminent.

The bread being baked, the whole party lay down for the night, Rashleigh handcuffed to his night guard. The night passed without incident, and after a hurried meal next morning, they set out again without pausing until midday, when one of the men said that he knew from the lie of the land that they were now not far from Campbelltown. Rashleigh thought that the man must be mistaken, as judging by the distance they walked, he imagined that they must be nearer to Liverpool or Sydney; but he soon learnt that bushrangers

took circuitous routes through wild country as a matter of course, often travelling great distances to reach a destination only a few miles away by crow-flight.

The party penetrated a dense scrub, so closely grown that they could not be seen at a distance of three yards, and began to clean and prepare their arms and make face masks. This done, they lay quiet until dusk. Nightfall saw them in motion again. They went steadily for four miles through open forest land, and then halted, while two of their number were sent forward as scouts to observe what was happening at the house they intended to attack. As soon as they had returned and reported to Foxley, the whole gang moved stealthily forward, guided by the spies. The single bark of a dog was the only interruption when they came to a narrow lane, where, after a consultation, the party divided itself into two groups of four, one climbing the fence on the right of the lane and the other continuing along it in careful silence. Rashleigh was with the latter quartet, and after proceeding a few rods was deeply concerned to find that the cottage at which the bushrangers paused was none other than that in which he had been so hospitably entertained by the Marshalls. His fears for his friends increased when he gathered from the threatening talk of Foxley that Bob Marshall had at one time been Foxley's overseer and had had him flogged, and that the bushranger had now come to take his revenge.

Silence and darkness seemed to fill the doomed house, and what particularly surprised Rashleigh was that there was no sign of the six ferocious dogs which he knew Marshall had about the place as a protection against just such an event as this. Two of them in particular had been trained to pull down and kill anyone hanging about after dark, and yet not so much as a bark occurred. As a fact, the animals had

been shut up in a shed for the night, in order to prevent an accidental attack upon any of the guests who had been invited to the christening party in honour of the Marshalls' youngest child, which was going on when the marauders arrived. The gang knew nothing of this until, while anxiously awaiting a signal from their confederates, a peal of merriment rang out from a building at the rear of the cottage, together with the music of fiddle and tambourine, the common instruments at a colonial 'sheevo' or merry-making. On hearing this, the bushrangers passed along the side of the house into the stockyard, and came to a large barn through the chinks of which light was streaming. A dance was evidently in progress, and the four men waited outside until joined by the other four.

When they had come up, Foxley ordered a search of the other barns and outhouses, and no one being found in them, he went to the barn door and knocked loudly. After a short pause the door was thrown open, and the merry gathering saw, instead of a late guest, a grim array of armed and masked figures massed in the doorway. Screaming children clutched at the skirts of pale and terrified women, and the men huddled together, unarmed and helpless.

Foxley, with a coarse laugh, advanced into the centre of the floor, glaring fearfully at the assembly through the slits of his mask. 'What!' he roared, 'are you all scared of a few young fellows coming to your spree uninvited? Won't anyone welcome us? Where's our host? Ha! there you are, Mr. Bob Marshall. Come out here!'

Foxley's pistol was cocked and pointed at Marshall's head, and the settler had no alternative but reluctantly to obey the summons.

'You're not going to shoot an unarmed man, are you?' he

said in an anxious voice, looking round to where his wife was standing surrounded by the terrified children.

Foxley made no reply, but signed to O'Leary, who came forward with a pair of handcuffs, which he fastened to Marshall's wrists and then led him out of the barn.

The leader then proceeded with the secondary business of his raid, ordering all the inmates of the place to group themselves on one side of the door, while two of the bushrangers proceeded to pick the pockets of every one of both sexes, and to rob the women of their jewellery. One young woman went into a violent fit of hysterics, causing a good deal of confusion by her struggles and cries, and one young couple, taking advantage of this, slipped silently through the doorway. Rashleigh saw them go, and confronted them as they were about to climb a fence. His masked face caused the girl to shriek, but her companion turned boldly on the intruder.

'I dare say you are armed,' he said, ignoring or misinterpreting Rashleigh's deprecatory gesture, 'but you had better stand back, for, by Heaven, you shan't lay a finger on that girl except across my dead body!'

'Be quiet, for God's sake,' said Rashleigh. 'Luckily your friend's scream was drowned by the row going on in there, or you would have been nabbed by now . . .'

'Look here, man,' interrupted the other, 'here's all the money I have, and my watch. Take that and let her go. I don't give a damn about myself.'

'No,' answered Rashleigh, 'I don't want your money. Run like the devil to Campbelltown and tell the Chief Constable that Foxley, the murderer, and his gang are here; and tell him to hurry with help, or he will be too late to save Marshall and his family from being slaughtered. Go, go quickly!'

While the two made off swiftly into the night, Rashleigh cautiously returned to the place that had been assigned to him in the shadow of the barn. Foxley was still standing in the doorway supervising the pillage of Marshall's guests, searching every individual thoroughly without any regard to modesty or decency, until he had before him a great pile of mixed booty – money, jewels, watches, trinkets, silk handkerchiefs, coats and waistcoats: everything that could be of the slightest value to the bushrangers had been taken to swell the pile. He was inexorable, no sentimental appeals for the most valueless trinket having the least effect upon his iron heart; tears, lamentations and entreaties leaving him unmoved. The most valuable of the smaller articles of plunder he crammed into his pockets and into his hat, ordering the rest of the loot to be packed into sacks. The sacks he put outside the door and, leaving two of the gang to guard the prisoners in the barn, went across the stockyard to where O'Leary was standing guard over Bob Marshall. He ordered the pair to follow him, and called to Rashleigh to follow them with the provision bags. Coming to the back door of the cottage, and finding it locked, Foxley burst it open, and the three men with the prisoner walked in. The house being in darkness, O'Leary was sent for a light, and on returning with it, the table was found to be loaded with lashings of food and drink ready for the feast.

'What money have you got in the house?' demanded Foxley of Marshall.

'Only about four pounds,' replied Marshall.

Foxley then drove the unfortunate settler before him to show him where the cash was; and in a few moments Rashleigh heard the noise of furniture being smashed, and the loud curses of Foxley at the meagreness of the plunder. They came back to the room, leaving the bedroom door open.

revealing the disorder of the results of the man's anger in strewn clothes, broken drawers, overturned chairs. Marshall was next forced to disclose his stock of tea and sugar, which Rashleigh transferred into his provender bags under O'Leary's direction.

'What's happened to the money you got from the sale of your wheat?' he heard Foxley ask the settler, who answered that it had all been paid away with the exception of the amount of which the bushranger had possessed himself.

'I know that's a damned lie,' shouted the ruffian. 'But it don't matter. If I can't get it, I'll take damned good care that you don't live to enjoy it.'

His meaning was so clear that Marshall showed signs of fear, and turning to the implacable bushranger he began again to plead.

'Surely you wouldn't murder a defenceless man who never did you any harm?' he began; but Foxley silenced him with an oath. 'Think of my poor wife and children,' Marshall continued.

'Think of your damned tyranny!' snarled Foxley, suddenly snatching off his mask. 'Look at my face, and see if you recognize Philip Foxley, whom you got flogged for neglect of work.' He paused to enjoy the effect of his revelation, and then went on in a voice terrible with malignancy: 'If you had as many lives as I got lashes through you, aye, ten times more, I'd take every one of them to-night. So make up your mind to die. I've already slaughtered eleven of my old masters and overseers, and you'll do nicely to round off the dozen. There's some debts that I never forget to repay.'

Rashleigh saw his friend's frame tremble with terror at the fate with which Foxley threatened him, for the bushranger was notorious as one of the most bloodthirsty devils living

without the law, and his mere identity had shaken Marshall's nerve. With an effort the settler calmed himself and, unresisting, allowed Foxley to drive him out into the stockyard.

No sooner was he out in the open than his wife and her sister sprang forward and caught him in their arms, demanding to know what they were doing with him. Somehow they had run the gauntlet of the guard of the barn, who were not so far degraded as to fire easily upon women.

'Drag those women away,' shouted Foxley, enraged at this interruption in his plan of vengeance, for the execution of which he was now impatient.

Mrs. Marshall and Jane struggled heroically to retain their hold on their doomed relative, but their strength was no match for that of the ruffians, and in a few moments they were being dragged back to the barn.

'McCoy, you take him over there,' commanded Foxley, indicating Rashleigh. 'And you, O'Leary, is your piece loaded with ball?'

'It is,' was the viciously laconic reply.

'Then, Marshall, kneel down and pray for the last time,' he said in a cold tone. 'I'll give you ten minutes.'

Still as a rock, Foxley took out his watch and stood watching the dial by the light held by one of the bushrangers, and as Rashleigh moved away with McCoy, he could hear the frenzied voice of the settler, not praying to God, but begging the bushranger for mercy. Turning to look back, he saw that Foxley did not so much as raise his eyes from the watch-face to look at the man he was about to murder. Sick at heart at his own impotence to help his friend, he reached the fence to which he had been ordered with his guard, and was about to climb over it, when a yell from Foxley startled him.

'Down! down on your knees, you scum!' he heard him shout in a frenzied tone. 'Here, O'Leary, he won't pray, so

be ready when I give the word – and aim right between the eyes.'

Marshall's answering wild supplications for mercy were suddenly drowned by the reports of about a dozen muskets. Rashleigh looked round in alarm, and saw the bushranger who was holding the light for Foxley fall to the ground with a piercing yell of pain.

'Surrender in the King's name!' vociferated several voices at once.

'Fire at the swine, and keep close together!' came the answering shout from Foxley.

The darkness was spangled with the bright flashes of the guns, followed by a pandemonium of shouts, during which the bushrangers, forming round their leader, made their way to the fence where McCoy and Rashleigh had remained, paralysed by the suddenness of the attack. They scaled the fence in a body, and raced across the Marshall clearing and reached the cover of the standing timber.

'Have you got the slavey safe?' demanded Foxley, as they paused for breath.

'Aye, I have,' came the answer out of the darkness.

'That's lucky for you,' retorted Foxley, 'for if he had escaped, I'd have finished you where you stand.'

The gang found themselves reduced in number to five, three of them having fallen at the opening of the attack, but whether they were dead or only wounded no one had had time to discover. They travelled hard in an easterly direction all night, and when daylight came, went into hiding in a deep and rugged gully. They were in a bad humour, for the food had all been left behind in the hurry to escape, and all the plunder lost except the smaller articles which Foxley and McCoy had concealed about their persons.

Rashleigh himself was in a bitter mood. He had thrown

away the chance to escape with the young couple whom he had helped in the hope that he might be able to do something to save Marshall, and help the police in the capturing of the gang. The close guard of McCoy had prevented him doing anything but look on, however, and his only satisfaction was that he had at least been instrumental in saving the settler's life. Handcuffed to McCoy, he lay watching the ease with which his companions slept after doings which kept him awake with horror, and wondering how long it would be before he managed to escape from their foul company.

When the bushrangers awakened, all hungry, they turned fiercely upon their compulsory cook and carrier, cursing him for having been such a fool as to leave the provisions behind. O'Leary added a sound blow over the head to his complaint, and was about to repeat the dose, when Foxley intervened. The man turned on his leader with imprecations and threats, and a fight between them was only prevented by the intervention of the other members of the gang. Peace of a kind was patched up, though O'Leary showed by his malignant glances at both Rashleigh and his leader that he was only biding his time.

Towards evening Foxley and McCoy assembled all the spoil which they had brought away, and the leader divided it up into four approximately even parts, and the men cast lots as to who should have which share. Rashleigh was, of course, not a party to this dividing of the spoils. Next it was decided by lot who should go into Campbelltown or Liverpool to purchase a supply of food, and the task falling to O'Leary, each of the bushrangers gave him a sum of money. He then disarmed himself and set off.

After he had gone the other three men held a conference, and from the odd sentences which Rashleigh overheard, he concluded that they doubted O'Leary's loyalty to the gang

generally, and that Foxley feared immediate treachery from him. He suggested that they should move to cover in a more secluded spot until O'Leary came back, so that, should he bring anyone with him, they would have a chance to fly. They therefore went about half a mile distant from the camp into the bed of a narrow valley overhung with trees. Foxley went back and lay in hiding near the camping ground, to be ready to guide O'Leary to the new hiding-place, should his fears prove mistaken, leaving Rashleigh, McCoy and Smith dozing by the fire. Late in the evening they were aroused by the return of O'Leary, accompanied by Foxley, bringing with him a good supply of tea, sugar, bread and salt pork, and four bottles of rum. Rashleigh hastily cooked some of the meat in a calabash and brewed some tea, and was allowed to share the meal with the gang. When they had finished eating, O'Leary proposed that they should all have some grog, and produced a bullock's horn-tip as a drinking-cup. His manner struck the others as suspiciously friendly all of a sudden, and it was noticed that while he pressed the others to copious draughts of rum, he himself drank scarcely any. He explained that he had drunk all he could carry at Campbelltown. His good humour increased until he was almost gay, while Foxley grew more and more gloomy and taciturn, and at last he wrapped himself in his skin cloak and lay down to sleep. Rashleigh, whom they omitted to handcuff, followed his example, and the effects of the rum made him fall quickly asleep. He awakened suddenly, aroused by the roar of the fire in a sudden squall of wind. He got up and took a place farther from the fire, and as he lay down again he noticed that the other two bushrangers were snoring in the deep sleep of intoxication. O'Leary lay at a little distance, as if asleep, but the watcher caught a gleam in one of his eyes as the flame flickered, lighting up his face. Rashleigh was

already half asleep when he noticed O'Leary turn his head and look furtively towards himself and Foxley, who was as deep in sleep as the others. The suspicions which he had heard mentioned by the others, and the queer behaviour of the man after supper, made Rashleigh keep watch on him while feigning sleep. He saw O'Leary rise cautiously, take the calabash in which the pork had been boiled, and creep towards where McCoy and Smith lay with their guns beside them. He dropped some of the liquid over the locks of the guns, and spilt some also over the pistols in their belts.

He now cautiously approached his leader, placing an open knife between his teeth. His dread of Foxley was clear from the scared look on his face as he peered into his sleeping face. Foxley's gun lay between his knees, so that it could not be moved without waking him, so O'Leary gently unscrewed the bolt which secured the flint, which he could get at without disturbing the sleeper. He then opened the pans of both pistols so that the priming fell out, and treated the locks with liquid from the calabash. Paying no attention to the unarmed cook, O'Leary rose to his feet, picked up his own musket, and stealthily disappeared in the direction of Campbelltown.

It was clear to Rashleigh that the man intended to play the traitor to his gang. His confederates' arms having been made useless, he had evidently gone to guide the police to them. His first notion was to make good his escape while his captors slept, and leave them to the fate they so richly deserved, and give himself up to the police; but he reflected that, if O'Leary's plan were successful – as seemed certain unless he warned the others – he would undoubtedly be convicted. O'Leary's word would certainly be accepted, and his unveiled dislike of Rashleigh promised that he would make

the case against him even blacker than against the others, as being actively concerned in the robbery and attempted murder of Bob Marshall. The idea of being tried for complicity in this crime was especially repugnant to him, as he could not endure the thought that Mrs. Marshall and her sister, who had treated him so companionably, should have even false cause to suspect him of such base ingratitude as to have joined, freely or by compulsion of circumstances, in the attempt which had been made upon them.

He decided to awaken Foxley and denounce O'Leary to him. He went cautiously over to where the leader lay and aroused him with a touch of his foot, causing Foxley to leap to his feet and simultaneously level his weapon at Rashleigh's head.

'Stand off or I'll fire!' he cried. 'I'll never be taken alive.'

Then seeing who it was confronting him, he listened while Rashleigh acquainted him with O'Leary's actions and his suspicions of what they portended. Foxley, having confirmed these statements by examining his weapons, awakened McCoy and Smith, and warned them of the danger that threatened them.

The bushrangers hurriedly, cleaned, loaded and primed their firearms, and, after a short discussion, decided to withdraw to the thickest of the neighbouring scrubs and there await events. Having disposed Foxley's opossum skin rug and part of the clothing of the other men, to give the semblance of sleeping men in the places where they had previously lain, they retired to their watching places. The time of waiting, in the intense cold, seemed interminable, but at last their strained hearing detected the noise of crackling twigs and a rustling in the brushwood. Rashleigh, standing next to Foxley, was appalled at the savage expression which made his face diabolical as he watched to

see what these sounds portended. His eyes were glaring with cunning and bloodthirstiness, and his tongue wet his lips as he saw O'Leary approach the abandoned bivouac with cat-like stealth. O'Leary carried a gun, and was followed by four well-armed men into the open space. After a whispered consultation they separated and approached the heaps of clothing which they took to be their victims. At a sign from Foxley, he and his confederates fired at the constables, two of whom fell immediately. Before O'Leary had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to be able to present his piece, Foxley clubbed his gun and, rushing upon the traitor, dealt him a blow which broke the stock of the musket and dropped him without even a groan. The unwounded constables fired their pieces at random and then made off.

The three bushrangers surrounded the fallen traitor.

'He ain't dead,' said Smith, in a venomous tone. 'Stand aside while I blow his brains out.'

'Hold!' shouted Foxley, knocking up the other's gun as he was about to fire. 'Don't hurt him for your life. I wouldn't let him die so easy a death for a thousand pounds!'

He fetched water and bathed O'Leary's face until he recovered consciousness.

The bushrangers then proceeded to examine the fallen men. The first was stone dead, and while they were stripping the body naked, Rashleigh saw the other, whose thigh was broken, raise himself, and deliberately resting his barrel on a log, take careful aim at McCoy, who, unaware of his danger, was standing guard over O'Leary. The bullet just missed the bushranger, burying itself in the trunk of the tree against which he leaned. Foxley, with a bestial roar, sprang upon the wounded constable with his knife, stabbing him with abandoned savagery until his yells weakened into muffled sobs. As the ringleader raised himself, McCoy

THE MEMOIRS OF

sprang in to finish the job, battering in the skull until the brains were pulped. They then completed the gruesome task of stripping the two corpses, which they flung into a water-hole.

Rashleigh almost pitied O'Leary as his intended victims turned their attention to him. They tied him safely, against any attempt to escape, and drove him forward with blows and execrations, whilst Rashleigh went on in front of the queer procession, loaded with the provisions. Shortly after daylight they crossed the great South Road, one of the bush-rangers scouting ahead to ensure their way being clear, until they entered a tract of gloomy and sterile country which sloped downwards unbroken by any timber except the mis-called forest oak, a tree which seemed to Rashleigh to have been so named by a cynic because of its utter dissimilarity to the oak of England.

The spot at which the party finally halted in the afternoon seemed to Rashleigh portentous of the crime which he was sure was about to be committed. It was a great vault-like glade formed of gloomy trees which grew out of grassless gravel soil, shutting out the sun. The silence which brooded there seemed treacherous and unclean, as if nature were malignantly still in anticipation of the foul crime which was toward.

He was ordered to make a fire and prepare some food, while O'Leary was partially unbound. Foxley eyed the traitor with stern hate for some minutes.

'Well,' he said at last, 'have you got anything to say for yourself, you blasted wretch?'

'No. I'm only sorry you weren't all grabbed,' retorted O'Leary, in a tone of concentrated hatred. 'There's nothing on earth I'd rather see than all three of you bloody, cowardly, murdering dogs hanging in a row.'

McCoy, standing near, raised his musket and struck the traitor full on the mouth, driving in his front teeth. O'Leary fell unconscious, but Foxley was remorseless.

'Get some water and bring him to his senses,' he ordered. 'Then we'll make him fast to a tree, and flog him for as long as we can stand over him. After that we'll hang him up to feed crows.'

O'Leary recovered consciousness, and was duly bound to a tree. Foxley, the corners of his mouth drooping with barbarity, took off his broad leathern belt and began to flog him with the buckle end. Rashleigh's stomach turned at the sight of the bloody back, the flesh of which was rawed to the bone before Foxley's arm tired and he handed the belt to Smith. He had seen many vicious floggings, but they were as nothing to this, which Smith continued until O'Leary's shrieks and bitter oaths gradually ceased and his head fell on one side, his frame drooping in its bonds.

'So you're fainting, are you!' exclaimed McCoy, taking the belt from Smith. 'I'll bring you to again.'

The sagging body was once more belaboured with the ruddy buckle-end, until it seemed to Rashleigh that the traitor must be dead.

'Hold your hand, McCoy,' said Foxley, 'or he'll not have enough life left in him to make him worth hanging.'

All ordinary methods of resuscitation failed to bring the suffering ruffian back to consciousness, when Smith sliced a piece of salt pork into the water in which Rashleigh had washed other slices, and poured the briny liquid into the lacerations of their victim's back. This treatment, reminding Rashleigh of the curative treatment on the hulk at Portsmouth, was instantly efficacious. O'Leary screamed and howled in torment, punctuating his cries with such bitter

reproaches that Foxley ordered him to be gagged. It was clear to Rashleigh that torture had numbed the fellow's senses, for he was watching with dull eyes the other bush-rangers plaiting a cord of stout vines, saw one of them climb a selected tree and fasten one end of the rope round a limb twelve feet from the ground, without seeming to comprehend that these activities had any connection with his doom. It was not until the running noose was made, and a pile of logs set up immediately underneath, that his dulled wits functioned. He suddenly began to struggle with his bonds, and gnashed his teeth upon the securely tied gag-stick, muttering incoherently, his eyes rolling and glaring with rage. The bonds held, and the gag would not be bitten through.

Foxley, having assured himself that everything was in readiness for the final act of his play of ruthless vengeance, caught at O'Leary and began to drag him towards the improvised gallows; but the prisoner flung himself to the ground and struggled so formidably, despite his bonds, that it was all that Foxley and Smith between them could do to lift him to the pile of logs which were to be his last stance on earth. His struggles resulted in the pile of logs collapsing; but there was little strength left in the frenzied man's frame. The noose was fastened around his neck, and Foxley, taking him bodily in his arms, lifted him on to the falling logs, ordered his confederates to tauten the rope, and then flung the traitor's body from him with a savage gesture. O'Leary swung to and fro, his limbs twitching and jerking in a fashion which turned Rashleigh sick. He had forgotten the attempted treachery which had caused the scene; he saw only a fellow-man suffering eternities of unnecessary, diabolical agony. Somehow he could not tear his gaze away from that twitching, convulsed, grotesque body, and the staring,

glazing eyes in a face turning slowly from blue to black. It was an offence against humanity.

'Oh, blow the poor devil's brains out!' he cried, in an agony of pity.

'Blow nothing,' retorted the leader. 'I wouldn't shorten his jig by a single second – not for a million pounds. He did worse than a dog's deed of dirt; now let him die worse than a dog's death.'

Foxley watched with an expression of malignant satisfaction as the death-rattle came at last, accompanied by a frame-shaking convulsion of the limbs – and O'Leary was an unsightly corpse turning slowly at the end of the stretched rope.

Rashleigh was at once ordered to prepare food, which the three bushrangers ate hungrily, seasoning the meal with coarse jests about the appearance of their dead comrade in his death pangs. With the consciousness of the corpse swinging so near at hand, the cook had no stomach or appetite for food. He gathered up the fragments of the meal and the few utensils, and longed to hear the order to proceed on their way and put as great a distance as possible between him and the slowly twirling hanged man.

'Hi, you, gather up some fuel and stick it under that,' Foxley ordered him, jerking his head towards O'Leary's corpse.

There was no use in protesting or refusing, and Rashleigh, his heart heavy with sickness, did as he was bidden. Foxley set fire to the pile and cut the rope as soon as the blaze was leaping.

'The crawling scoundrel's got a warmer bed now he's dead than ever he had in life,' remarked Foxley, with a harsh laugh. 'Come, boys, stoke up.'

While Rashleigh stood by, sickened by the ghastliness of

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

the scene and the foul stench of burning flesh, the bush-rangers joked and gibed as they fed the pyre until the gruesome cremation was completed.

The party then proceeded on their way to their next infamy, making not even a pretence at burying O'Leary's remains.

CHAPTER XIV

ABOUT noontide of the following day they reached the Cowpasture River, which they crossed on a catamaran improvised from apple-tree boughs bound together with vines, and gained the rough, broken country lying at the foot of the mountain range which traverses the middle of New Holland. Never had Rashleigh been in a more solitary and forbidding place; and so poor was the soil that even the native grasses grew so scantily that there was not pasturage even for the hardy indigenous animals of Australia.

They travelled for three days through this sterile country without coming upon a house or a single human being. To add to the prevailing depression, the provisions began to run short; but towards noon on the fourth day they came to the summit of a lofty range, from which could be seen a prospect of such beauty and majesty that Rashleigh forgot for a few minutes all the torments and fears that had accompanied him, whilst he revelled in the glory of the panorama below and before them. A steep precipice fell for some hundreds of feet before him, down to the broad expanse of low country. At the precipice's base the Nepean River, confined by high banks to a width of only one hundred yards, roared tumultuously along its bed strewn with immense rocks around which the water was churned into whitest foam. Far on either side glorious glimpses of the winding river could be seen through the foliage, like a giant silver ribbon threaded through a tapestry of green and brown. Against the sky rose the sombre mountains, their rolling sides almost covered by the dark evergreen growths of New Holland, with here and there a naked peak rising boldly to sublimity. Between the precipice and the hills stretched nearly level

THE MEMOIRS OF

woodland, broken in odd places by cultivated patches of varying sizes sparsely studded with solitary farm-houses and cottages, and one or two hamlets distinguishable by their churches.

Most of the houses were encircled by peach orchards, the delicate green of which made pleasing contrast with the sombre hue of the indigenous trees. The lofty tasselled tops of the blossoming maize swayed gracefully over acres of rich soil along the river bank, and Rashleigh was only recalled from the dream into which all this sudden beauty had plunged him by the fierce grasp of Foxley's fingers on his shoulder.

'What are you mooning at?' he demanded in a harsh, sneering tone. 'Get a move on.'

Immediately his mood fell to resentful apathy, and not daring to think of beauty, he turned mechanically and followed the party as they set forward to penetrate more deeply among the hills.

'Keep a sharp look out, now,' warned Foxley in the early afternoon. 'We're nearing the great Western Road that leads over the hills to Bathurst. We've got to cross it somehow, and it's as like as not that there are guards or police knocking around. Since they brought the prisoners up to build this new road, there's no knowing who's about. Wary, now.'

Foxley had scarcely spoken when the bushrangers paused, alert, at the sound of a shrill cry, called a 'cooe' in the colony, which was used as a means of informing people of one's position and to seek guidance. While the party halted, listening attentively, the same voice repeated the cry thrice. Smith moved off alone in the direction whence the cry came, to investigate, while the others plunged into the heart of the thicket. They had not waited long when they heard Smith's

voice, and another's, and Foxley immediately beckoned the others to join him and went to meet the two men.

The new-comer was a short, thick-set man about fifty, decently dressed, and carried a stout walking-stick. Smith introduced him.

'This is Mr. Huggins, the overseer of No. 1 Iron Gang,' he said. 'He tells me he has lost his way hunting for bushrangers.'

Rashleigh saw the glint of malignant satisfaction in Foxley's eyes as he gruffly acknowledged the introduction, and shuddered at what it portended of a renewal of horror and suffering. Huggins himself seemed uneasy, and glanced apprehensively from one to other of the bushrangers.

'Well,' said Foxley, after some moments of rumination, 'I think I can put you in the way to find the bushrangers right soon. At any rate, Mr. Huggins, I can be certain of taking you *home*.'

The overseer missed the significance of the peculiar emphasis laid upon the last word, and accepted the proffered guidance. The whole party therefore set out to the west. Rashleigh, from the snatches of conversation between Foxley and the new-comer, was amazed to hear with what calm effrontery the leader described himself and his crew as bush constables belonging to Campbelltown, who had been sent in search of the notorious Foxley and his gang, then supposed to be lurking in the fastnesses of the Blue Mountains. Encouraged by this information, Huggins talked at length and eagerly of the urgent need of putting an end to the depredations of these infamous scoundrels.

'If I could come across that swine Foxley,' he concluded, 'I would shoot him in his tracks like a dog.'

Foxley glanced over his shoulder at his confederates, at this sally, his features twisting into a grin of sardonic con-

tempt, causing Smith and McCoy to grip their guns more tightly. So they walked on for about an hour, before the length and direction of the journey began to rouse Huggins' suspicions. He questioned Foxley as to his certainty about the direction they were taking. To this he received the reply that they would be 'as safe as the bank directly.' They had not proceeded much farther when, descending a very deep and rugged gully, Foxley tripped the man up and, as he fell, crashed down on top of him. The others came up quickly, and in a few minutes Huggins was bound securely, hand and foot.

Experience warned him of the trap into which he had fallen, and he at once began to beg for mercy, pleading with the hardened ruffians not to harm him; but, as he looked from one grim and grinning face to the other, he realized that there was as little hope of mercy from these men as from a herd of wild beasts. Foxley's only reply was to seize him by the collar and, assisted by one of his confederates, drag his new victim to the bottom of the gully, into which only the dimmest light could penetrate.

They found, after some searching, a small level space, where Foxley handed the prisoner over to Smith and McCoy, while he stood glaring at him with malignant cruelty.

'As,' he began presently – 'As you have such a mighty great wish to see Philip Foxley, I think it would be a pity if so reasonable a desire shouldn't be granted.' He paused a moment before declaring in a tone rasping with hate: '*I am Foxley*. Now, what d'you think of me? Why don't you shoot me in my tracks like a dog, eh, you *talker*? It's a great favour to see me and my mates,' he went on sarcastically, 'but we always take great care that those who have enjoyed the sight shan't tell anybody they've done so.'

Huggins seemed to shrink with fear before the concen-

trated venom of the man, and in his rabid terror began again to pour out supplications for mercy.

'Shut up, you worm!' cried McCoy. 'Take a look at me. Don't you know me?'

Huggins looked, but failed to recognize the man.

'Aye, but you do know me,' continued McCoy; 'you know Sandy McCoy. It's not twelve months since I was under you, in your bloody gang. One day when I wanted to see the doctor you put me in the lock-up for six-and-thirty hours handcuffed to a beam over my head, so that all my weight was on my wrists and my toes just touching ground. Christ! if you forget, I remember. Now it's our turn, and you may as well say your prayers, for you're standing on your grave.'

'He did that trick on you, did he, McCoy?' said Foxley; and listening to his story, Rashleigh could understand the hard ruthlessness of the bushrangers. 'That's a common hobby of his and his kidney. Not a month since one of his deputy-overseers was tried for killing a poor devil who was sick, like you, and wanted to go to hospital. But Mr. Huggins ordered him to be triced up, and his deputy did as he was told, and left him there two days and two nights. The first night the deputy was told the man was dying, but he answered, "Let him die, and be damned too!" So the next night, when the doctor came at last to see him, the poor devil was dead - stiff as a rod. That crawler, though he was committed, managed to get clear. But I'll take damned good care you don't escape from justice, you murdering swine, for I'm judge and jury in this here court, and I never acquitted a tyrant in my life.'

Huggins now threw himself on the ground in an agony of despair and terror, beating his head on the rock. Then he knelt to Foxley, alternating supplications with im-

precations, until at length the leader of the gang broke out:

'Blast the crying beggar! He'll make us all deaf. Gag him.'

As he spoke Foxley suddenly leapt up and began to act like one demented. Swearing and roaring, he jumped about, rolled on the ground, and finally began to tear off his clothes until he stood stark naked: whereupon he recommenced his wild dancing antics, whistling, shouting, singing, halloing and swearing all in a breath. It was some minutes before Smith, McCoy and Rashleigh understood the cause of this quaint exhibition. The more to enjoy his triumph over Huggins, Foxley had sat down incautiously near a huge nest of ants, of a species vulgarly known in the colony as light-horsemen. They are phenomenal pests upward of an inch and a half long, blue and green in colour, and are the fiercest and most virulent biters among all bush insects. While Foxley had sat still they had not molested him, but when he had moved, they had stung him by scores, and now his body was smothered with swellings the size of hazel nuts. His companions judged how intense the pain must have been from the fact that he, who was then grimacing and yelling with pain, had been seen to endure the most severe floggings without so much as wincing.

Foxley at last gathered up his clothes and shook them free from the ants, cursing the now prostrate Huggins as the cause of it all.

'Blast you!' he roared, with demoniac ferocity. 'You can lie there; but I'll waken you with a vengeance before I'm done. Make me some ropes,' he ordered the others with a snarl. He himself joined them in the task of improvising ropes out of rolled bark lining, and when the cords were made, set about cutting and trimming a number of stakes,

which he sharpened at the end. He then made Smith and McCoy gather all the logs and short timber lengths that they could find, while Rashleigh looked on wondering what new diabolism was in preparation.

The three bushrangers approached Huggins and stripped him of every stitch of clothing, and dragged him – despite all his violent resistance – over to the ant-bed. Then Rashleigh understood. They were going to tie the man down and leave him to one of the most dreadful deaths ever conceived by the debased imagination of man. He began to beg Foxley to desist, using every argument that his frenzied mind could lay hold of, finally reminding the outlaw that sooner or later his turn to suffer for the crimes he committed must come.

Fear or premonition made the brute's patience give way. He turned upon Rashleigh with a thunderous roar: 'Hold your damned tongue, you blasted, crawling scum, or else I'll lay you alongside of him! I know damned well that if I'm taken alive I shall swing. Meanwhile I'll live to be revenged on such bloody tyrants as this.'

This outburst was followed by others of as violent and vicious an intensity from Smith and McCoy, and realizing that his protests could do nothing but increase the tragic horror, he walked away and turned his back on the gruesome scene. Very soon a piercing scream startled him so that he involuntarily turned round. They had placed Huggins on the ant-bed, and the excruciating pain of the first legion of stings from the enraged insects had lent him herculean strength and he had broken from his captors, and began to run. McCoy flung a stone at him, which, catching him between the shoulders, felled him.

'Hi! you,' yelled Foxley to Rashleigh, 'come and help get this dog tied up.'

He had no alternative but to obey, except the death to

which they had condemned Huggins, and so Rashleigh was obliged to carry the practically senseless man back to the ant-heap. The ants were angered and scared by the second thud of his body, and in a few moments had completely covered him. The bushrangers began coolly to tie the wretched man down with cords fastened to the stakes which Foxley had prepared, securing him as firmly as the Lilliputians did Gulliver. The agony which he was suffering from the myriad bites of the swarming ants set him struggling like a madman, but the only effects of his efforts were that he still more infuriated the ants, and tightened the bonds against which he struggled. Rashleigh was dizzy with sickness and fell to the ground in a faint, striking his head upon a sharp stone. Almost instantly he recovered consciousness, and was allowed to go, under the guidance of McCoy, in search of water. After a prolonged search they found enough for their immediate purposes, and he prepared a meal of what remained of their provisions. Presently Foxley and Smith came up, and the leader, noticing how scanty was the fare, swore that had he known how depleted was the larder, he would have cut a steak off Huggins's body before giving it as a meal to the ants. Rashleigh could not suppress an expression of mingled incredulity and disgust at the loathsome suggestion.

'Aye, softy,' said the brutal Foxley, 'I tell you there isn't a tastier morsel in this world than the heart of a tyrant.'

For a bitter instant Rashleigh was tempted to retort that Foxley should himself make the most toothsome meal that ever could be cooked, but checked himself in time.

After supper the party lay down to rest, and started out again at an early hour in the morning towards the Western Road' whence they had come after meeting the luckless Huggins. They passed the spot where he had been tied to

RALPH RASHLEIGH

the ant-heap, and Rashleigh was swept with nausea again to see that nothing but the untouched head and the clean stripped bones remained of the thick-set overseer. To this kind of end did the criminal penal code lead; for, undoubtedly, he reflected, the man would never have been killed but for the fact that he had been so brutal in his punishment of McCoy, and Foxley himself had suffered at the hands of other overseers before making his escape.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN they approached the Western Road, McCoy was sent forward to reconnoitre, carrying with him a pistol, a pair of handcuffs, and a letter which had been found upon Huggins, whose clothes he wore. Foxley instructed him, in the event of his being met and questioned, to pass himself off as a constable who had been sent from Penrith with a letter for Overseer Huggins.

McCoy returned after about two hours and reported the way clear. The whole party then recrossed the road, wandering all that day without food in the vicinity of the road, until, after nightfall, McCoy was again sent off, this time to procure eatables somehow from a station which they knew to be not far off. Rashleigh, worn out by hunger and fatigue, fell asleep, and far into the night was awakened by Foxley.

'Rouse up and bear a hand,' he was ordered, 'and eat that.'

Rubbing his eyes, Rashleigh found a piece of bread and a chunk of raw salt meat, and began to eat, knowing that it was too dangerous to light a fire for cooking so close to the road. As soon as they had fed, he was handcuffed to Smith, whose arms had been taken from him, in accordance with the newly evolved scheme that they should masquerade as prisoners in charge of Foxley and McCoy, *en route* for the Penrith lock-up.

They now went boldly along the road, and at the end of the second mile Rashleigh recognized a place as Lapstone Hill, the most easterly of the Blue Mountains, and not far distant from his old quarters at Emu Plains. At the foot of the hill they found two drays standing, under which, according to practice, the drivers were encamped, with the draught oxen grazing near by. The sham constables marched their

prisoners up to the camp fire, ordered them to halt, and asked the four men who had emerged, at the yelping of their two dogs, whether they could get a drink of water.

'Just wait a few minutes,' responded one of the draymen, 'and we'll make you some tea.'

'My mate and me don't care about tea,' said Foxley, 'but if you've a mind to give these poor devils of prisoners a drop, I dare say they'd be glad of it before they get to their journey's end in chokey.'

'If that's where they're bound for, God's pity on them,' said the kindly bullock-driver, as he set an iron pot on the fire to boil water.

The whole group now sat round the fire, and helped to get ready a feed for the travellers, with the hospitality which was customary in a mode of life in which all peaceable persons were at the mercy of the bands of armed plunderers on the highway. Such men as these bullock-drivers were at pains to ingratiate themselves always with the convict classes so that they might get a good name among them. It was with this end in view that, while the constables were treated with just ordinary civility, Smith and Rashleigh were supplied with pipes and tobacco with which to indulge themselves while the food was being prepared.

The bullock-drivers, while their guests were eating, inquired as to the charge against the prisoners. McCoy replied with the prearranged story.

'They are bolters,' he said, 'belonging to that gang of Foxley, the bushranger, but they won't split on his whereabouts. But we'll very soon have him along of them.'

The name of the dreaded bushranger aroused the drivers to a pitch of excitement which was a tribute to that scoundrel's reputation.

'Was Foxley near here?'

THE MEMOIRS OF

'How long since he was heard of?'

'Which way d'you think he was making?'

'What was the latest crime he'd done?'

To all these questions McCoy replied circumstantially, saying that Foxley was thought to be somewhere near Bathurst, but had been reported as going back to the south, where he had lately been robbing the whole countryside.

'He may be a great terror, this Foxley,' he concluded in a bold tone, 'but I only wish me and my mate could come across him. We'd show him.'

'For my part,' said the elder of the bullock-drivers, 'I'd like to make a child's bargain with this Foxley – let be for let be. For folks do say as he's a regular devil, a very fire-eater; and, anyways, as you know, it don't do for us folks that's on the road to be meeting with gentry of that sort.'

'Och, botheration to such clack,' struck in a bright-looking Irishman. 'What a clatter you make about Foxley, as if no one knew anything about him at all, at all, but yourself. Sure, and ain't Phil Foxley no other but my own uncle's wife's sister's husband's sixth cousin, and didn't him an' me used to be gossoons together in Ould Ireland? Mark my words,' he went on, looking directly at Foxley, 'if Phil was before me now, all that would be in it, he'd say at wanst, "Murtagh Cassidy, me jewel, is it yourself!" and he'd trate me with the best he'd got, and so he would.'

Foxley was smiling with grim enjoyment of Cassidy's bluff, and whispered to McCoy, who nodded.

'But did you ever see Foxley since you came to this country?' he asked the Irishman.

'Is it me see him?' retorted the other, unabashed. 'Faix thin, Mister Constable, maybe it's wanting to trap me you are. I'll only tell you, though, that I seen him a good many

times in the counthry – but when and where, I'll just not tell ye. You can get no hould on me for that.'

'Oh, I don't mean you any harm,' said McCoy. 'But I'd like to know what size and look of a man he is. I've got a description of him from the runaway list, but that was took long ago, when he first came out.'

'Och, faix, if it's your luck to take the poor boy prisoner, then God's will be done. What sort of a man is he? Well, he's like meself, for we always used to be took for brothers whin we was together.'

The bushrangers and Rashleigh himself were hard put to it to suppress their smiles at this, since the speaker was red as a fox and not more than seven stone, while Foxley was twice his weight and as swarthy as a Moor. A greater dissimilarity could hardly be conceived, and it was immediately obvious to them that the bullock-driver's intention was simply to focus interest upon himself, and that he had never seen Foxley, or even heard a description of him.

'I should just like to know whether there is a chance of falling in with this same Foxley,' observed another bullock-driver, 'for I could guess what to do in such a case.'

'Indeed,' broke in Foxley himself, 'then I can promise you for practically certain that Phil Foxley is nearer this than my mate here thinks. I'm certain I've been close to him to-day, and I'll swear to be alongsides him to-night.'

'Well, then, if he's as close as that,' said the bullock-driver with a look of alarm, 'I'll just get my musket ready; and I'd advise you to do likewise, Jem.'

He and Jem thereupon disappeared under the dray, and returned with two old military firelocks. Jem remarked that the charge had been so long in his gun he would draw it out, but Foxley, seeing that the screw on the end of the ramrod was broken, offered to do it for him. Meanwhile, McCoy

had got possession of the other man's gun on the pretence of examining it. At a mutual sign the two bushranger-constables laid down the drivers' weapons, and immediately presented their own pieces at the astounded men, warning them to stand still on peril of their lives.

'For,' added Foxley in a terrifying tone, 'I am Foxley, the bushranger.'

As he said this, Murtagh Cassidy was stooping to light his pipe, and instantly dropped pipe and knife into the fire, leaped over the piled bullock bows, yokes and chains, and made off at the speed of a hunted deer. McCoy took aim, but Foxley, roaring with laughter, knocked up the barrel.

'Damn him, how he runs away from his relation!' he cried, tears of merriment running from his hard eyes. 'Come back, you fool, to your sixth cousin Phil! He won't. Then blast him, let him run, for he can't get help within three miles. He's too damned scarified, anyhow, to look for help where it might be found.'

The bushrangers now robbed the bullock-drivers of everything worth taking and looted everything of use to them from the drays, after which they were led by Foxley by a circuitous route until they reached the foot of the mountains where they are washed by the Nepean River at the northern extremity of Emu Plains. Here, just at dawn, they halted and enjoyed the first square meal they had had for forty-eight hours, and then proceeded to examine their plunder.

They had acquired half a chest of tea, a bag of Mauritius sugar, a basket of Brazilian tobacco, and a quantity of clothing, shawls and handkerchiefs, as well as a supply of flour and pork, which ensured them against a renewal of famine for at least a week. The greater part of the day was spent in sleep, but at dusk McCoy was again dispatched to spy out the land. Very soon he returned and led them to a spot on

the river bank where was a large bark canoe which he had stolen from a settler's wharf, and into this they got and paddled for some hours, keeping as much as possible under the shade of the mountains and on the uninhabited side of the river. Occasionally the unavoidable noise made by the paddles set the farmers' dogs running along the bank, barking so vociferously that their masters and mistresses were aroused and made their appearance on the high opposite bank, peering across the river with the light of bark torches, and hailing to know who was on the river. The lights they carried blinded them to everything outside the radius of their glare, and the bushrangers passed on unmolested until the dawning of day warned them to resume their hiding. They ran the canoe into the reeds, unloaded her and, having carefully concealed their cargo, penetrated to a fastness and slept.

In the evening the three bushrangers had a conference, at the end of which Smith was left in charge of Rashleigh, while the other two set off towards the river. Rashleigh learnt from Smith that their hiding-place was in the North Rocks near Richmond, and that the other bushrangers had gone off to dispose of the plunder. They returned late in the morning and gathered all the goods together in readiness for the appearance of the purchaser, who was expected at any moment.

This man, when he appeared, Rashleigh found to be none other than the district constable, a fellow notorious throughout the colony as the scourge of all petty offenders. He was known as Sobersides, and had some years ago received his discharge as a prisoner. At first he had endeavoured to become the toughest flash-man in his district, being notable as the hardest living scamp in the whole population, but he suddenly turned hypocritically pious, dropped his evil lan-

THE MEMOIRS OF

guage and habits, outwardly, and drew wool so thickly over the eyes of authority that the village parson appointed him his clerk and sexton, and the village magistrate gave him the position of district constable. From behind this pallisade of respectability he became wealthy as a fence and receiver, and by accumulating bribes from his clients and other offenders, yet outwardly acting the part which he had with such diabolical shrewdness assumed. So subtle and safe were the means which he adopted to maintain his dual rôle of guardian and breaker of the law that Foxley and his confederates all wore masks when he appeared, as they did not trust him to recognize them, knowing how deep was his capacity for double dealing. The deal was speedily made, after which they retreated to a still more secure hiding-place, where Smith and Rashleigh were ordered to keep a look-out while Foxley and McCoy slept.

At the upper end of the valley known as North Rocks the face of its walls is cut by many chasms, and it was in one of these that the outlaws went into retreat. Its entrance was low, but within it was a commodious place from ten to twelve feet high, and its sandstone floor was quite dry except for a corner in which dropping water had hollowed a basin two feet wide and eighteen inches deep, constantly filled with clear, cold water. In the roof was a rift in the rock, open to the sky, but so overgrown with brush that it was practically invisible from above or below, yet sufficient light percolated through it to light the cavern.

At night they carried the goods which Sobersides had agreed to purchase to the river bank, and presently he came alone in a boat and paid for them. The goods were transferred into the boat, which made off, and the three bush-rangers stood apparently in earnest consultation, which ended in their turning abruptly towards the river. On the

bank they paused, while McCoy carefully searched the reeds, coming back presently with a catamaran, in which they quickly crossed the stream, taking Rashleigh with them. They climbed the high opposite bank, and he heard the hum of voices directly in their route. Foxley and McCoy walked closely on either side of him, and they went on in silence until most of the houses were left behind. Whilst the other three halted, McCoy went forward alone, returning to beckon the whole party forward to a house standing by itself. Lights were burning in the rooms and a female voice was heard singing. Foxley knocked upon the door and the whole party was admitted.

A young and handsome Australian woman greeted McCoy with kisses, and the whole party entered a typical, spacious settler's living-room, in which there were many evidences that the occupants were living in easy circumstances. In a few minutes two other girls and an elderly man and woman came in, and all welcomed the visitors with obvious friendliness, pressing food upon them, which they declined. Rashleigh noticed McCoy take one of the girls aside and, after some conversation, give her money. She went out immediately, while Foxley and Smith carried on a cheery talk with the other two girls. The girl returned with a keg on her head, and was enthusiastically greeted by the whole party, who all, excepting Rashleigh, drew up to a table and settled down to cards and rum-drinking. On entering Foxley had ordered Rashleigh to sit in a certain place in the room, threatening to shoot him dead if he made any move to change his place.

At the other table, his companions were rapidly growing drunk and noisy, and the room was ringing with songs and roystering. Presently Foxley, after eyeing Rashleigh morosely, got up and staggered over to him.

'Why 'n hell aren't you drinking?' he demanded thickly. 'Think you're too much a gen'l'man for my comp'ny?'

In vain was it that Rashleigh pointed to a teacup which he had just emptied of rum and water, and assured Foxley that he had been drinking every time his cup had been filled.

'A tea-c-c-cup!' hiccupped the outlaw. 'To the devil with such a — hic — shell as a tea-c-cup!'

He lumbered over to the fireplace, seized an empty quart pot, and, after spilling a great deal of liquor, at length filled it with rum from the keg. He handed the filled pot to Rashleigh.

'Here, damn and blast your miserable, snivelling carcass, take this and drink it up directly. I'll see you don't keep sober while we get drunk, so that you can go and bring the traps to nobble us. G'wan, drink that lot at once.'

Rashleigh remonstrated, but Foxley responded by cocking a pistol and holding it against his head.

'Drink, you b——r, or die!' he shouted, menacingly.

So the luckless fellow took the pot and began to drink the raw, strong spirit, and every time he paused for breath, Foxley pressed the cold barrel against his temple: 'Down with every drop!' he yelled. Rashleigh, feeling as though his inside was on fire, had to drink, and as he drained the pot, he heard a savage laugh in his ears, and sank insensible to the floor.

When he recovered consciousness he was raving with thirst, and his whole body was in an agony of acute distress. He tried to rise, but fell back instantly; he tried to speak, but could not; and he lay in burning torture unable to move, but with his brain uncannily clear. He heard Foxley's voice talking, and a female voice answering. They must have been aroused by Rashleigh's fall, for presently their alarm quiet-

ened, and their conversation took another turn, from which he gathered that the woman – who was evidently in bed with the bushranger in this room – was trying to impress upon Foxley's drink-mused mind the magnitude of the booty he could get if he would only follow her advice about some enterprise of which she must have been speaking before the interruption.

'If you really loved me, Phil,' he heard her say, 'would you let me go about in a print dress, while that saucy bitch Nancy Doughboy has a silk gown? Here's your chance to prove you really love me. Go to it.'

'I'll get you a whole wardrobe, pretty,' said Foxley, maudlin.

While other sounds took the place of speech, Rashleigh's rum-bewildered brains were in a ferment of fear as to what new atrocity was contemplated; and at each new onslaught of the fumes appalling delusions of demons and furies seemed to sweep around and through his tortured being, taunting him with his cowardliness in being associated with such devils incarnate as the man in bed with a trull, and his associates. Better to die than . . . Pains shooting through his limbs and throbbing at his temples banished coherent thought, and dreams of hell and damnation thronged his imagination through hours of pain.

It was before dawn next morning that the bushrangers, dragging Rashleigh with them, left the house to return to their lair. In his weakness he had to brace himself with a draught of the rum before he could revive in his poisoned body enough energy to move from the room; and as he stumbled through the darkness with his tyrannical companions he prayed for death to end his sufferings. He was still under the effects of his gargantuan draught of spirits when Foxley awakened him at the end of a day's troubled

THE MEMOIRS OF

sleep and ordered him harshly to rise and come along with the others.

The moon in her first quarter was just above the trees as they set out upon what Rashleigh, with last night's overheard conversation in his mind, little doubted was an adventure even more nefarious than those he had already unwillingly shared. Foxley went forward with more than his customary caution, and the reason was clear in the almost continuous baying of house-dogs, which proved the district to be well populated. They trudged for some hours in silence, coming at last to a large clearing, in the centre of which was a cluster of huts in darkness. The marauders walked boldly up to these, and lifting the latch walked into the main building, closing the door behind them just in time to prevent the house-dogs from leaping after them. As McCoy secured a light, a man in his nightshirt came out of an inner room into that in which the group of four men were standing, grumbling drowsy imprecations on the noisy hounds which had disturbed his sleep. Before he knew that he was not alone, Foxley's hand was on his shoulder and his pistol muzzle pressed against his forehead. The man started and began to cry out, when Foxley whispered harshly:

'Silence, or I'll drive a brace of bullets through your skull!'

Driving the householder to the other side of the room, he demanded to be told what other men were asleep in the house.

'Only my two sons and a stranger,' was the reply.

'Where are they?'

'In yonder,' replied the old man, who was shaking as with ague, pointing to a door other than that from which he had emerged.

Foxley, leaving Smith in charge of the settler, went with

McCoy into the room, and Rashleigh heard his rude voice arousing the inmates, and in a few moments three men in their shirts were driven in to stand beside the first prisoner.

'Now call your wife and daughters out here,' Foxley ordered the old man, 'and, mind, if there's any more men, even another one, I'll shoot him dead, with all the rest of you.'

The women, pale, disordered and trembling, made their appearance, and McCoy encouraged them to have no fear as he said that no harm was intended to their personal safety. Foxley confirmed this assurance, and ordered the women to prepare food for his party. The women went to do his bidding, and Foxley turned to the settler, who stood motionless, suppressing his natural indignation at the outrage that was being put upon his household.

'Well, Mr. Shannavan,' said the outlaw, 'I have been told that you came up from Sydney the other day with a big swag of property, and I've called for my good share of it. You look slippy and bring it out here to the light, and mind you bring every mortal thing; for, if you don't, I shall know, and I'll flog you within an inch of your life. Where is it?'

The old man paused, looking round helplessly for some moments.

'In my bedroom,' he managed to stammer out at last.

'Then come with me,' commanded Foxley in a tone which made the settler take the lamp and lead the way into the bedroom.

Smith, meanwhile, had been looking steadfastly into the face of the stranger who had come in with the settler's sons, who seemed considerably disconcerted by the bushranger's scrutiny, repeatedly changing his position in an attempt to avoid the other's gaze.

THE MEMOIRS OF

Foxley returned with the settler, from whom McCoy took the wearing apparel and other goods which he had been forced to bring out, and Smith at once addressed him.

'I say, Foxley, who do you think we have nailed at last?'

'Sure I don't know. Who is it?' replied the leader, at the same time taking steady stock of the stranger, who deliberately hid his face from view. Smith stepped forward, laid hold of his ear and turned his head round with a sudden jerk.

'Come, Mr. McGuffin,' he said, in tones of coarse sarcasm, 'let's have a look at your pretty mug. You didn't used to be so bashful.'

Foxley let out a savage roar of triumph.

'Why, 'tis McGuffin, the tyrant!' he cried, in incredulous tones.

'You may well call him that,' said Smith. 'Why, the last time I ever saw him he flogged our whole gang, fifteen of us – fifty lashes each for the working hands and one hundred for the overseer, without us being charged with any crime at all, and without the shadow of a trial. And when Jack Bunn, the overseer, and as good a man as ever broke bread, asked what the flogging was for, this scum answered, "Why, to keep the hair out of your eyes."'

Never had Rashleigh seen such hate flash in any man's eyes as shone then in Smith's.

'Aye, I know him well by report,' Foxley remarked. 'Ain't he the beautiful inspector of falling parties that Major Fireplace got power for from the Governor that he might flog any or all men in the gangs under him without bringing them to court? And hasn't he gone on horseback about the country with a flogger at his heels like a running footman, serving out stripes to all and sundry? And now, my gentle-

man, *I've got you*; and I mean to see if I can't wipe off all scores with you. You've served out your last floggings.'

The intensity of passionate hate in the bushranger's tone seemed at first to appal McGuffin, a tall, weather-beaten, swarthy man with unusually stern features, but by the close of the leader's tirade he recovered his nerve and self-possession.

'Well, you infernal, cold-blooded, murdering, treacherous ruffian,' he said, giving better than he had got, 'and what *can* you do, after all, but only take my life, and that you may do, and be damned. Yes, I have had hundreds of such loathsome, crawling slugs as you and your mob flogged. And I've one comfort left yet, and that is that neither God nor man can keep you much longer from the gallows, for the Devil has almost done with you, and Jack Ketch must soon get his due in choking you and your loblolly boys. So you may do your worst. I defy you!'

This front of indomitable boldness seemed to paralyse the bushrangers, though almost at his first word Foxley had deliberately cocked a pistol and levelled it at McGuffin's head. As he went on, Foxley seemed to hesitate in his purpose, though the gathering storm on his brow revealed the deepening intensity of his rage, while Smith and McCoy stood gaping as though under the enchantment of the prisoner's audacity. The instant McGuffin ceased speaking, however, McCoy, suddenly livid with a tide of rage, felled him with a blow from the butt end of his musket, at which a loud shriek burst from one of the onlooking girls, who sank senseless to the floor.

'Now, by all my hopes of a black revenge,' said Foxley, 'I'm glad you knocked the bragging bully down; for I was on the point of shooting him, and it would have been ten thousand pities he should get so easy a death. Is he hurt

much?' McCoy bent down, and assured his leader that he was only stunned. 'What ails that girl?' demanded Foxley of the settler's wife.

'She was frightened for her lover,' answered the shaking woman.

'Her lover?' queried Foxley, a diabolical light in his eyes.

'Yes, they are soon to be married.'

Foxley crashed his hand on the table with a gesture of evil glee.

'Better and better! This is glorious!' he roared. 'Boys, we shall have capital sport presently. Bring the wench round as quickly as possible.'

He paced the floor with hurried, uneven strides, as if labouring under some extraordinary excitement.

'McCoy, throw a bucket of water over that grovelling beast,' he commanded. 'And now, Mistress, let us have supper directly.'

McGuffin, revived by the douche of water, was bound fast to a mill post on one side of the room, and the bushrangers then tied the father and his sons into a kind of bundle, so that they could not move a limb.

The bushrangers then sat down to supper, facing their prisoners, and invited Rashleigh to join them. He, however, was suffering from such nausea that he declined to eat. He had apprehended Foxley's horrible intention to commit an atrocity infinitely worse than any he had yet fouled his soul with, and he sat shivering with dread and longing for a means to escape from a scene which would be unendurable; yet he was completely awed by the threatening looks and gestures which Foxley kept directing towards him.

The ruffian insisted upon being served by McGuffin's betrothed on her knees, and tasting everything on the table, goading and insulting her cruelly.

'You'd best keep me in a good temper,' he jeered, giving her an obscene embrace. 'Your superfine scoundrel that you've chosen for husband is in my hands. You'll never bed with him unless you're kind to me.'

After supper the women were forced to set spirits before the callous ruffians, and Foxley ordered one of the girls to fill a hopper of the steel mill with wheat. McCoy then partially unbound McGuffin and ordered him to grind the grain.

'I'll see you all in hell first,' said the prisoner tersely.

Foxley leapt up: 'Oho, you mutiny, do you! I'll test how game you are.'

He secured a stirrup leather, tore McGuffin's shirt from his back, leaving him stark naked before men and women, and began to beat him with the heavy buckle-end. McGuffin struggled valiantly, but was unable to free himself from the skilfully knotted bonds, and fell back upon taunting his tormentor with words which cut into his vanity as deep as the buckle into his own back.

'Hit, man, for Heaven's sake! Why, you couldn't knock a sprat off a gridiron; you couldn't brush a fly off your mother's nose.'

Foxley, enraged, laid on with redoubled fury, lacerating the man's back until the blood ran in a stream to the ground, until he was compelled to leave off from lack of breath and strength: 'Ah, you cowardly beast,' McGuffin went on, 'I knew from your looks that you were nothing but a flogger, the first time ever I set eyes on you; and you can't say that I ever flogged a man myself in my life.'

Foxley, almost gnashing his teeth with rage at this sarcastic reproach – for a flogger was on a parallel with a hangman in New South Wales – flung down the stirrup leather, and, muttering something about being deeply revenged, left him.

THE MEMOIRS OF

As he went back to his place at the table, his glance took in the two sobbing girls clinging to their mother, who was almost inanimate with fear and horror; and Rashleigh saw again the flash of triumphant diabolism in his eyes.

'Ha,' Foxley shouted, 'I have it!'

He sprang suddenly upon McGuffin's betrothed and tore her out of her mother's arms.

'McCoy, you take the other girl; and Smith, push the old bitch into the bedroom, and see she doesn't get out again.'

Feebly resisting and pouring out moving entreaties, the mother was rushed brutally from the room, while the girls struggled against the loathsome embraces of the two bushrangers.

Rashleigh's cowed manhood suddenly flamed, and he rushed at Foxley begging him to be merciful; to remember his mother, his sisters – and tried to wrench the almost fainting girl from the arms of the sinister devil who was intent upon shaming her in front of her lover. Foxley struck him full in the forehead with the butt end of his pistol, and thus saved him from being an eye-witness of the ruffianly defloration of the two innocent girls.

When consciousness returned it was over. The girls lay sobbing uncontrolledly where the bushrangers had flung them, and McGuffin's limbs were raw and bleeding where the bonds had bitten him against his wild straining. His face was set and deadly pale, and in his eyes was a look that turned Rashleigh's heart to water. As he got to his feet Smith asked him whether he was content to mind his own business, or did he want the night's sport to finish with a blue pill (bullet) in his head.

'Go on, do!' shouted Rashleigh, almost insane with disgust at the wretchedness of the life he was compelled to lead.

'Shoot me, and make an end of it all. As well die that way as by the rope.'

'What's all this?' demanded Foxley, turning.

'Only this jackass is tired of life,' answered Smith; 'and I think it'd be a damn good thing to finish it for him.'

'Not on your life, you don't,' said the chief. 'The crawling beggar shan't get out of our clutches as easy as that. He's going to wish himself dead a hundred times before we're done with him.'

Foxley pushed him through the door and drove him before him to a neighbouring open hovel, where a horse stood.

'Saddle that beast, and lead it to the house,' he ordered.

When the horse was ready, and the two, with the horse, had returned to the house, Foxley called to McCoy to bring out McGuffin, who came out with his hands fast tied behind his back. Foxley now mounted the horse, and Rashleigh was ordered to take up a great bundle of plunder and bring it along. He resolutely refused to do this, his reawakened manhood being proof against the kicks and blows which Smith and McCoy rained upon him. At last they bound the bundle to his back, and fastened him securely to Foxley's stirrup, by the wrists.

McGuffin had been left standing alone during this episode, and Rashleigh saw the outraged girl who was to marry him slip out of the house with a knife in her hand, and cut the cord which bound her lover's arms. Swiftly they disappeared through the door, which was instantly shut. Foxley, who was busy directing the others in the securing of Rashleigh, looked up just as the door shut.

'Ten thousand devils, seize the scoundrel, he's gone!' he yelled, digging his heels into his horse's flanks. The animal was young and leaped forward in alarm at the sudden

summons, dragging Rashleigh along the ground for some yards, then plunging and rearing with fright, flung Foxley over its head, just as the stirrup-leather snapped and freed Rashleigh. It then bolted off at top speed. Foxley leapt to his feet, unhurt, and saw that McGuffin, who had fled through the house, was nearly at the river's bank, running frantically. The three bushrangers discharged their muskets together, but McGuffin raced on unharmed. Foxley and McCoy started after him, leaving Smith in charge of Rashleigh, whom the bushranger began to beat with the butt of his gun, while swearing that he had only made the trouble he did to give McGuffin a chance to escape.

The runaway reached the bank and plunged in just as the bushrangers fired again, and before they had time to reload and fire a third volley, he had climbed out on the opposite bank, and, with a loud shout of defiance, dived into a thicket and disappeared from view.

Foxley and McCoy returned slowly to the house, their expressions sullen as thunder at being thwarted. They fell fiercely upon Rashleigh and beat him, as though he was the cause of their outwitting.

'There, blast him, I think that'll do for now,' panted Foxley at last. 'And, anyhow, we'd best make tracks before we have the whole of Richmond after us.'

The spoil was divided in four parts, each carrying his share, and the party went quickly to the river-side, plunged amongst the tall reeds and began to force their way along the bank, often up to the waists in water, McCoy advising this route as they would leave no trace, and no one would dream of looking for them there.

For hours they toiled along until at last they came to a great tree which had long since fallen into the river, but the water being shallow, many of its limbs were still above the

surface of the stream, though so much overgrown with reeds as to be invisible from the bank. Here the fugitives rested, and Rashleigh, tucking himself into a fork of two limbs, stretched his bruised and weary body and slept for some time. His rest was broken by dreadful dreams in which he fancied himself locked in mortal struggle with Foxley, whom he had almost overpowered when McCoy gripped him by the throat, and, presenting a pistol to his head, inflicted a painful wound, the anguish of which awakened him to find that Smith's hand actually was on his throat. He made wild gestures, pointed to the shore and motioned him to shift silently and cautiously to a place of more secure concealment.

His new hiding-place was almost completely screened from the bank, but he could himself see through the close fence of reeds, and he saw what explained Smith's silent urgency. There were a number of armed men quite close, one of whom, mounted on horseback, he recognized as McGuffin, with whom were standing Shannavan's two sons, one of whom he heard assuring the rest of the party that he could swear that he had glimpsed a man down there in the reeds.

'If you think there is anyone there,' came his brother's voice, 'let's fire a volley, and it's ten to one that one of our bullets will tell, or at any rate make him sing out.'

This advice was evidently approved, for in a few moments there was a discharge of fully twenty muskets, and balls rattled close to the party of bushrangers. Foxley seemed to have been struck, for Rashleigh saw him change colour and sway as if about to fall from the position in which he cowered. The leaping hope that the tyrant was dead was short-lived, however, for the leader clenched his teeth and tightened his grasp on the bough that upheld him.

THE MEMOIRS OF

The search party moved off, firing into the reeds from time to time, whenever anything moved beneath them. It was very late in the night before the bushrangers at last ventured out and cautiously made their way back to the cavern in the North Rocks.

Here they found awaiting them the three young women at whose house they had recently spent the night, and who had been there awaiting their return since before dawn on the previous day. These wantons, the vanity of one of whom had been the cause of the whole blackguardly expedition, were actually waiting for a share of the spoils. Their love of finery had made them envious of the fine clothes which it was known had been bought for the approaching Shannavan wedding, and they had incited Foxley and McCoy to plunder their rivals.

The raid had been successful for the women, and when the articles of apparel were laid out before the admiring and acquisitive eyes, they broke into an avalanche of appreciation and gratitude to the men who had risked their lives, and plunged to such depths of human infamy, to gratify their wishes.

A meal was prepared, and the whole party sat round while Foxley gave the women a circumstantial account of all that had happened, dwelling in obscene detail upon the rape of the Shannavan girls, winning shrieks of applauding laughter from the strumpets.

'Those Shannavan girls, then,' remarked one of them, 'won't be able in future to hold their cocky heads so high when they meet our sort that's fond of sweethearting for its own sake.'

Rashleigh was amazed at the depravity shown by these pretty girls, who seemed utterly lost to all sense of womanly shame. He had heard of such victims of the conditions

imposed upon the convict classes, amongst which the long-continued evil habits of the parents had produced an indifference to virtue and an induration to vice, but this was his first encounter with the living, human results. The night wore on in a scene of growing indiscretion, until Rashleigh, consigned to a distant corner of the cavern, saw the women attach themselves to the men, to spend the night in the way which their upbringing and heredity had taught them was sensible and natural.

Despite his fatigue, sleep came hardly to him that night, for he was oppressed with the sense of humanity befouled and of ideals bedunged.

CHAPTER XVI

It was broad daylight when the desperadoes were awakened by the loud baying of hounds. As they stood tense and listening, they heard voices and realized that they were beset by pursuers who knew that Foxley was in the cavern. The voice of a man who seemed to be in authority was heard quietening the hounds, and then to ask if anyone knew what manner of cave it was. Another voice answered that it was a large place, but that it had only the one outlet.

The leading man's voice came again, shouting:

'Foxley, we know you are there. Come out now, for we will carry the hill away in handfuls, if need be; but have you this time, we will.'

None of the bushrangers replied, but all busied themselves loading their guns, and took up positions at the side where they could command the low entrance, to come through which a man must creep on hands and knees.

Several times the summons to surrender was repeated, but Foxley and his comrades remained dumb. Then a figure was seen slowly worming its way in. Rashleigh, unarmed, watched fascinated until the head came into sight, and his ears rang for minutes with the terrific impact of the explosion of the three muskets which his captors fired simultaneously, which was detonating in the enclosed space.

When the smoke had cleared he saw that the head had been only a cap stuck on the end of a pole, swathed in old clothes, which had evidently been pushed through with a view to discovering whether the opening was free of obstacles. A loud, gleeful shout came to them from outside at the success of the stratagem.

'Come on out now, Foxley,' came the leader's voice again. 'If you don't, we'll smoke you out like rats.'

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

'You can try, and be damned to you,' growled Foxley.

The man was as good as his word, and in a few minutes clouds of smoke came pouring through the entrance into the cavern, filling it so rapidly that the inmates had to fling themselves flat on their faces, pressing their mouths and noses close to the ground to avoid suffocation.

The terrified women managed to keep silent in their alarm, and presently they and the men found a part of the cavern, far back beyond the narrow slit which served as a chimney, where they were free of the smoke. The fire was kept replenished for about two hours, before the volume of smoke pouring in diminished and voices were heard speculating as to whether anyone was still alive within. The cap-and-pole ruse was repeated, but this time the bushrangers ignored it, and it was withdrawn. Next a volley of musketry was discharged through the opening, but no one was hit, as the bushrangers, anticipating some such action, were lying on the floor. The attackers grew bolder and more determined. Rashleigh saw three figures crawling through the opening, one a little in advance of the other two. Foxley was on his feet and slipped over to the side of the entrance; and the instant the first head showed crushed in the skull with a blow from the butt end of his musket. At the same time, Smith and McCoy fired at the dead man's companions, whose screams of pain were a signal for them to be drawn back by their friends outside, the dead body being left in the entrance.

Foxley ordered the others to lie down and fire with him through the opening. After this, only a mutter of voices could be heard, but the fire was relighted and again smoke came pouring in. Foxley stood gazing up at the rift in the roof, and calling McCoy to him the two began to fashion pegs from the remaining firewood, which they drove into

the sides to form hand and foot hold for climbing. When this job was completed, Foxley went up and disappeared through the overgrown rift. After some minutes he returned, obviously in high glee, and came swiftly down to the cavern floor.

'Thanks to Old Nick, Sophy,' he said, pinching one of the girl's ears, 'we can all get out of this trap as easy as kiss your hand. I've been right up to the top,' he went on, a trace of excitement in his tone, 'and I could see all those beggars below busy heaping wood on their damned fire; but they couldn't see me. And there's a gully only a hundred yards from this hole. If we can only get there unseen, we're as safe as a bank.'

Without wasting a moment he gave his orders, going up first himself so that he could help the women who followed, with McCoy behind to give him a heave from below. Rashleigh came next, loaded with food, and Smith brought up the rear.

Immediately they were through the women disappeared, and after pausing a few moments to listen to the noises made by their intending captors, the bushrangers with Rashleigh made their way swiftly along the gully and did not pause until they had put the hill between them and their assailants. On they went without halt or rest through the desolate country without meeting a soul all day. At nightfall they flung themselves down to rest in the gloomy recesses of a rocky ravine, not daring even yet to light a fire for the preparation of food. Fear of discovery obsessed them, and the gleam of a fire might have betrayed their retreat. In the dead of night Rashleigh was awakened by Foxley's voice.

'Help, murder!' he was yelling. 'I'm choking. Take his hand from my throat. Oh!'

They went to him in a body and found him in some sort of a fit, his eyes wide open, foam flecking his lips, his teeth gnashing, and incoherent, muttering sounds coming from his throat. They got water and flung it over him; but no sooner had this revived him partially than he leaped up and ran off at full speed. McCoy, warning Smith to look after Rashleigh, set off after their chief, whom they all thought must have gone suddenly mad. Smith, with blows and curses, drove Rashleigh before him in the wake of the others. The mad rush went on throughout a day and night, Foxley going ahead as if all the devils in hell were after him, forcing the others to follow at his own tiring pace. At last they halted on the edge of the valley of the Cumaroy, over one hundred miles from the scene of the outrage upon the Shannavans.

The whole party were completely exhausted by their flight, and to add to their miseries the weather suddenly broke and settled down into a heavy deluge of rain. Thunder crashed and the forked lightning brought great trees thudding to earth, threatening their lives at any moment.

The shelterless wretches were without even the means of stripping a sheet of bark, the ordinary resource of Australian bushmen; while they were entirely unable to start a fire. Unendurably fatigued, they had no recourse but to take what rest they could on the swimming ground, or by leaning against trees which might at any moment be struck by the lightning. Their clothes were drenched, and all their food was spoilt, but these calamities and discomforts were as nothing compared with the miseries of utter weariness.

Rashleigh, some time in the past, had read of a superstitious notion which had been prevalent in most countries

THE MEMOIRS OF

in the Middle Ages, that great and callous criminals were at the limit of their devilry cast off as unworthy of divine mercy, so that in the remainder of their lives they endure a foretaste of the doom of the damned after death. It was in this way, in the years that followed, that Rashleigh was inclined to interpret the astonishing and fearsome conduct of Philip Foxley, during the three days which he spent in the Cumaroy Mountains. His soul stained by repeated crimes against the entire Decalogue, this ruffian had lived apparently fearless of God or man, when suddenly he seemed to be cast into the very hell of remorse. A phrase of Scripture – ‘the wicked flee when no man pursueth’ – occurred to Rashleigh. Foxley would sit staring with vacant eyes into space and a strong, violent shuddering would come over his whole frame, and he would fall to the ground raving that he was being choked, that hounds were tearing him piecemeal – twenty times a day these and like terrifying conceits would set him in a panic. Smith and McCoy would resuscitate him as best they could, and then he would glare wildly at them and rush away with mad speed until his strength gave out or collision with some obstacle brought him to the ground. During these days he spoke not one rational sentence. If either or both of his confederates went near him, he would fix his blank eyes upon them without recognition. When they sought to soothe him with friendly talk, his glare would grow wild, and suddenly he would leap up and rush upon them as if to smash them to earth.

At the end of the third day, while Foxley was for a time quiet in his semi-conscious state, Rashleigh overheard a conversation between Smith and McCoy, from which he gathered that they had decided that their leader was hopelessly insane, and that they were deliberating as to the advisability of kill-

ing him. Smith's suggestion was that they should toss a coin to decide which of them should murder him, and then, the deed having been done, they should cut off Foxley's head and deliver it to the authorities with some plausible tale of the hardships the bearer had endured in capturing the notorious bushranger. This plan, he maintained, might ensure the pardon of one of them, at least. For some time McCoy demurred, but at last consented to think over the scheme until morning. The rain-storm continued unabated, and the two plotters withdrew to the rough shelter of boughs which they had erected.

Rashleigh had constructed a storm shelter of his own, with boughs thatched with leaves. It was not until the evening of the third day that he finished it, and, when Smith and McCoy retired for the night, he lay down and slept like a dead thing until late in the morning of this fourth day of Foxley's madness. He was awakened by a tremendous hullabaloo, and, peeping through the walls of his shelter, he saw Foxley bleeding profusely and swearing vociferously, so that he thought that the crime plotted on the previous night had been committed. On investigation, however, he learnt that the bushranger had made one of his mad rushes, had tripped over a root and crashed down so that his temple had been gashed by a sharp-pointed stone. Smith and McCoy were trying to stem the flow of blood which poured from the wound, but it was not until Foxley had lost nearly two quarts of blood that their crude bandage had its effect.

For three hours Foxley lay in a torpor. At the end of this time his eyes opened and it seemed as though the shock had restored his reason. He asked McCoy in a soft, weak voice, where they were and what day it was and, on being told the facts, seemed dumbfounded at the great distance they had

travelled since they escaped from the besieged cavern. The rain had at last ceased and as Foxley, after drinking a little water, sank immediately into a deep slumber, the others followed suit.

They did not wake until the morning of the next day. They had had only one real meal since leaving the cavern, and Foxley, having been weakened by loss of blood, was wild for food. It was therefore decided to take the chance of finding a settlement in order to obtain provisions. They climbed the banks of Cumaroy, trusting to come upon one of the stock or sheep stations which they knew to be dotted here and there to the right of the Bathurst country. It was not until the forenoon of the next day that, after travelling some hours southward along the river's course, they came upon a small hut and stockyard in the centre of a natural clearing. The door was open and smoke was coming from the chimney; and the bushrangers discussed how best they might approach unobserved and so surprise the inmates. In the end they made a circuit through the trees until they were opposite the back of the house. Foxley and Smith, taking only their guns and pistols, dropped flat and began to crawl cautiously through the grass.

Rashleigh was left in McCoy's charge, and lay behind a log, from which position he had a clear view of the hut and clearing. He watched the desperadoes stealthily approach and saw, just as they reached a corner of the stockyard, a man come out of the hut carrying a whip and go over to a stable shed from which he led out a horse, ready saddled and bridled. As his foot was in the stirrup Foxley and Smith stood up and, covering him with their guns, ordered him to halt on peril of his life. The man, however, after a glance at them, vaulted lightly into the saddle, spurred his horse sharply and rode off. He passed within twenty yards of the

bushrangers who, again roaring to him to stop without effect, fired simultaneously. The rider's hat was shot from his head, but he rode on apparently unwounded and was soon lost to view among the trees. The bushrangers reloaded their pieces, and calling to McCoy to bring Rashleigh with him, entered the hut.

By the time Rashleigh, with his guard, reached the doorway, the three inmates were already on their knees before Foxley, who had them covered with a pistol in each hand, and was threatening them with instant death. Smith, with a look and a gesture, conveyed to McCoy his disgust at the way Foxley was conducting himself, and signed to Rashleigh's guard to shoot the leader in the back. But McCoy shook his head in vigorous dissent, and approached Foxley.

'I say, Phil,' he said in a quiet voice, 'don't work yourself up into a passion. It was food we came for. Let's make these crawlers get us a feed ready, for I'm damned hungry.'

'Is that you, Sandy?' asked Foxley, his eyes wild and glaring. 'I thought these swine had got you, and I was just going to slaughter them for it.'

'Oh, no!' laughed McCoy. 'I'm not taken yet. Come, get up, you fellows, and let's see what you've got to eat.'

The three trembling men sprang up and began to bustle about preparing food for their unwelcome guests. One of them was very tall, and his expression was forbidding and lugubrious in the extreme, and upon him Foxley fixed his mad gaze as if trying to recall where he had seen him before.

'Hey, you great long fellow,' he shouted, 'what's your name?'

The man started. 'Allen, William Allen is my name,' he answered.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'You lie, blast you!' roared Foxley. 'You're long Hempenstall that used to hang the rebels long ago in Ireland.'

'I am sure I'm not, sir,' replied the terrified stockman. 'I never was in Ireland in my life.'

'Now, look you, Sandy,' said Foxley to McCoy, 'ain't it a hard case that such a long, crawling caterpillar should try to make me out a liar? I tell you,' he went on, glaring at Allen, 'you are the walking gallows. I heard my father talk about you when I was little, how you used to go about with ropes, and when the soldiers caught a couple of rebels they would tie them together by the necks and throw them over your shoulder to choke to death.'

'How could it be me,' muttered the stockman. 'I'm only twenty-two.'

'Say that again and I'll tear your damned tongue out!' roared Foxley with a threatening movement towards Allen.

McCoy interposed again. 'Here, Phil, leave the long slab of a ghost alone and come and have some food.'

Foxley consented to go to the table, putting a pistol beside him before he began to eat. When the meal was ended his insane obsession reawakened. He shouted for Allen, whom he insisted upon calling Hempenstall, and forced him to sing to him and then thrashed him with a stock whip for making ugly faces. Tiring quickly of this he next insisted upon all three men dancing jigs, while he flicked wickedly at their legs with a whip to quicken their steps and liven up the dance. He carried on in this way until sunset, ignoring the pleas of Smith and McCoy that they should hasten away before the help arrived which the escaped horseman would be sure to send or bring. At first he just met their suggestions for flight with an idiotic laugh, but when after nightfall they began to press him urgently to go he worked himself up into a fury and told them to go by them-

selves. Rashleigh hoped that Foxley would persist in his course so that they might all be captured, but at last Foxley consented to go, and the weary travelling from crime to crime seemed to be about to start all over again. When, however, they had gone about a mile from the clearing, the mad leader insisted on passing the night in a convenient thicket, and not all the entreaties or warnings of the others would shake him in his decision.

They set off early next morning, but had only been on the march a few minutes when they came upon a camp of native blacks, from whose attitude it was clear that they had seen the white men approaching and were prepared to attack them. The firearms of the bushrangers, however, gave them a tremendous advantage over spears and boom-erangs, and after a tough fight the aborigines fell back, and the bushrangers pursued their flight. The natives, however, stole along on their flanks and rear, flinging an occasional spear, without, however, wounding any of their foes.

In the afternoon the blacks seemed to weary of pursuit and, after two hours had passed without any of them showing, the bushrangers halted for the night and hurriedly set about getting a meal ready. Scarcely had they begun to eat when the air was suddenly filled with savage war cries and a shower of spears and other missiles rained among them. Rashleigh and Smith went down, but were not seriously wounded. Smith and Foxley leaped up and fired their muskets into the thicket in which the blacks were hidden. Yells of pain told that the shots had found billets, and the bushrangers reloaded and fired again. Foxley's madness seemed to have dropped from him at the approach of danger and the excitement of action. With a grin of diabolical satisfaction he seized a brand from the camp fire and, calling

THE MEMOIRS OF

upon the others to follow suit, he set fire to the scrubby thicket in which the blacks were concealed.

Smith and McCoy snatched up flaming sticks and ran hither and thither setting fire to different parts of the scrub, until flames were leaping from a dozen points of the dry undergrowth. The wind was blowing into the thicket and carried the fire swiftly among the fleeing aborigines, whose screams and yells were terrible to hear. Soon the trees were alight, flaming like giant torches, while the fire roared; crackled and hissed with occasional explosions of pent-up air to add to the alarm and terror of the scene.

Some of the bolder natives charged out of the sudden furnace. Two or three were shot as they came out, and the remainder fled panic-stricken in the direction of their camp. The fire, having burnt out the immediate neighbourhood, could be seen leaping eastward, its glow lighting up the sky for miles.

While Rashleigh looked on, appalled at the lengths to which these lawless desperadoes were prepared to go, his imagination shocked by the possibilities of human suffering and loss along the trail of the fire, Foxley burst into a savage laugh of exultation.

'They say that a burned child dreads the fire,' he said callously, 'and if that's so we can get on with our supper without any fear of them black beggars coming back to disturb us.'

'I'm not so sure about that,' said McCoy. 'Maybe they'll come after us for revenge. I've heard say that the blacks in these parts will trail an enemy hundreds of miles for a chance to get even with him.'

'Well, well, perhaps so,' answered Foxley easily. 'All we've got to do is to keep a sharp look-out. But I don't think

they're likely to sneak up at us through the scrub again after the lesson they've had.'

The party thereupon sat down and finished their meal and passed the remainder of the night unmolested.

They were afoot early the next morning, and at about ten o'clock they were alarmed to hear the baying of several hounds. All the men, except Rashleigh, were aware of the significance of this new threat to their safety. They knew the country and knew that there was not a white man's habitation nearer than thirty miles to where they stood.

'By God!' exclaimed Smith, 'the wind is blowing from the south and that's where Bathurst lies. Those dogs are coming from that direction, and they've got tracking bloodhounds at Bathurst. I've helped track blacks with them myself. That's what it means: they're after us with bloodhounds!'

The fact that the baying was growing louder lent emphasis to his conjecture; but all they could do was to stand ready to meet whoever might be coming for them. They were soon put out of their suspense by the appearance of several mounted and well-armed men riding in the wake of bloodhounds, and several blacks, whose hairless, scorched condition proved them to be members of the tribe who had attacked the desperadoes the previous night.

Foxley, showing no trace of fear, watched the pursuers approach with a scowl of bitter hatred and defiance.

'They're bloodhounds, all right,' he said; and, looking keenly at the riders, he added, 'and, by all the devils in hell, there's that blasted McGuffin at the head of the party, and the young Shannavans alongside of him.'

A desperate, fierce, fighting expression came into his eyes and Rashleigh shrank back at the sheer brutal determination of the man.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'I don't know what you mean to do,' he said to the others in a voice that was rough with suppressed passion, 'but I'll never be taken alive, and I won't be the only man killed, either.'

McCoy and Smith both swore they meant to die fighting, and the three desperate ruffians shook hands all round and prepared for the battle. Rashleigh they neglected, and he crept away into a thicket, lying still behind a log, where he could see everything unobserved.

The spot they had chosen stood high, a shallow valley running between them and their pursuers, and the ground in front was practically treeless. McGuffin was first to see the men who had lately tortured him and raped the girl he loved.

'Here are the murdering, ravishing dogs at last. Hurrah!' he cried in a joyous voice. 'Down the swine, my lads.'

He fired his piece at Foxley as he spoke, but missed him, the bushrangers having each selected a tree for cover.

The two young Shannavan boys, and the two mounted policemen riding behind them, joined McGuffin in his cheer. They fired a volley and then, flinging down their carbines, the policemen drew their sabres and galloped up the hill towards the bushrangers, who were now attacked in the rear by a party of blacks armed with spears and boomerangs. The cutting off of their retreat meant nothing to the attacked men, for they had no thought of flight. Foxley stood his ground unflinchingly, and roared back a cheer of his own in answer to McGuffin's.

'Don't fire until the beggars are close up,' he ordered Smith and McCoy.

He waited until McGuffin was on the point of riding him down before he fired, bringing down horse and rider in a heap. McGuffin, however, was unwounded. He had

divined Foxley's intention and checking his horse suddenly, had caused it to rear, so that the animal received the charge full in the head, which was raised like a shield on the front of the rider.

McGuffin was on his knee when Foxley rushed upon him with clubbed musket, intending to beat out his brains. The younger Shannavan knocked the weapon out of his hands and brought Foxley to the ground with a blow from the butt end of his gun.

McGuffin leapt at Foxley as he fell, and a desperate struggle ensued. Young Shannavan danced round, hoping to deliver the *coup de grâce*, but not daring to strike or fire for fear of hitting his friend instead of the bushranger. The two men wrestled for minutes, neither able to maintain advantage over the other, until Foxley managed to clutch McGuffin by the throat and hold him down. His success was his undoing. As he knelt, striving to squeeze the life out of the prone man, one of the policemen brought his heavy sabre down upon his head with a blow that cleft his skull. Foxley died without a groan, but such was the tenacity of his grip upon McGuffin's throat that his right hand had to be severed at the wrist and each finger forcibly prised away.

Whilst this struggle was in progress, Smith had shot dead the second policeman, and had been himself mortally sabred by the other, the same man whose timely blow saved McGuffin's life. McCoy, who had slightly wounded the elder Shannavan boy, was knocked down by the younger one, and after a struggle was overpowered, disarmed and secured.

McGuffin was some time recovering from the effects of Foxley's death-grip, and when he rose he addressed the bushranger's corpse.

THE MEMOIRS OF

'You wretch,' he said with intense emotion, 'I've paid my vow at last. I've never been off my horse trailing you since you did it, and I would have hunted you to hell, and beyond hell, so I got my revenge.'

In the grip of passion he kicked the corpse, and, catching sight of McCoy in the hands of his captors, hate of the vile-ness he had indulged that terrible night flowed through him like a tide. He picked up Foxley's gun and rushed towards the bushranger. The man holding him let go, and instantly McCoy snatched a pistol which was hidden in his breast and fired point-blank before McGuffin could close. McGuffin toppled over, and the policeman cut McCoy down. The fight was ended.

The blacks had taken no part in the fight after loosing their first flight of missiles, but had been hunting round, looking for the fourth man whom they knew was with the party. They found Rashleigh and led him into the open just as young Shannavan and the policeman finished attending to McGuffin's wound. He was instantly recognized and handcuffed, despite his protest that he had been a prisoner in the bushrangers' hands.

The bodies of Foxley and Smith were tied upon one horse, and that of the killed policeman upon another. McGuffin's and McCoy's wounds were roughly dressed, and each was mounted in front of a rider, the Shannavans – the elder of whom was only slightly wounded – bringing up the rear.

Thus the melancholy procession rode into Bathurst, which town was reached on the third day, Rashleigh and McCoy being separately confined.

The inquest was held three days later, McGuffin appearing on a stretcher, and McCoy tied to an easy-chair. A verdict of justifiable homicide was returned in the cases of Foxley and Smith, and wilful murder in the case of the

RALPH RASHLEIGH

murdered policeman, against Philip Foxley, Christopher Smith, and Andrew McCoy, the last named being held to take his trial at the next sessions of the Supreme Criminal Court at Sydney.

Rashleigh, who had not been seen by any of the witnesses during the affray, and who had been found unarmed after it was ended, was next examined before a magistrate, and was committed for trial at the same time and place with McCoy for bushranging and robbery, crimes for which the punishment was death by hanging.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was some weeks before McCoy was well enough to make the rough journey to Sydney, and Rashleigh remained in prison until the doctors at last passed McCoy as fit to travel. The two men were heavily ironed and placed in a bullock-cart, guarded by a posse of mounted police, and Rashleigh was astonished at the kindly attitude of the crowd which assembled to watch their departure. The women in particular seemed deeply touched by McCoy's pallid features and his obvious weakness, and they received many presents of money, tobacco, spirits and provisions as they made their way through the streets.

McCoy's condition made slow travelling imperative if they were to get him to Sydney alive, and the hundred-mile journey was accomplished in ten days, the nights being spent in lock-up houses, the quarters of the road gangs, or at the military stations in the mountains. They passed many parties of their fellow-convicts employed on the vast road-building schemes which were then opening up the country, who all expressed sympathy with McCoy in anticipation of his certain fate. The bushranger was unrepentant and indifferent.

'Well,' he answered on one occasion, 'I've had a merry life, if a short one, and I'd sooner go and be hanged a hundred times than drudge like slaves as you fellows are doing. Why don't you all turn out like men, and then the blasted tyrants would soon be put an end to!'

An overseer asked the corporal in charge of the escort why he did not put a stop to this kind of talk, which so obviously incited the hearers to mutiny and worse.

'Why, how can I hinder the poor devil from talking?' answered the corporal, with a good-natured laugh. 'He's got

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

very little longer to live and talk, anyhow. Let him spout all and what he likes, I say. Besides, friend,' he went on with a cunning smile, 'don't you know that the more runaways there are, the more rewards there are for capturing them? What would the mounted police do if there were no bush-rangers?'

Rashleigh, overhearing this remark, recalled the exploitation of 'crawlers' which he had witnessed on the Emu Plains.

They passed one night at the Penrith lock-up, where Rashleigh was recognized as one who had recently left Emu Plains. A crowd had gathered to see the remains of the infamous Foxley's gang, and among the sightseers were the three girls who had been with them at Richmond. They were all much overdressed in the spoils of the marauding expedition against the Shannavans, and pressed to the side of the cart, expressing their sympathy with McCoy and their grief at the death of Foxley and Smith. The prisoners were then removed to the lock-up, and for the first time since their capture they were confined in the same cell.

'Well, what do you think of things now?' said McCoy when they were left alone. 'Wouldn't it have been as well if you'd joined Foxley and the rest of us at the first, seeing what a dog's life we led you, and here you are, at the end of it all, as sure to be hanged as I am?'

'As for being hanged,' answered Rashleigh, 'we've all got to die some way. And I'd as soon be hanged and out of it all as live the life of cruelty and crime such as that scoundrel Foxley lived.'

McCoy responded with a nasty sneer.

'You dared not call Phil a scoundrel while he lived, and you're an unmanly swine to do so now he's dead.'

'Look here, McCoy,' retorted Rashleigh, enraged, 'I tell

THE MEMOIRS OF

you that if Foxley had been alone with me, unarmed as I was, or if I'd once been able to lay hold of a loaded musket, he would have known what Ralph Rashleigh dared to do. And as for you, if it weren't that you are sick and weak, I'd beat your brains out on that wall to repay you for some of what you've done to me, you blackguard.'

McCoy was on his feet in an instant, and flung off his jacket.

'Come on, you crawling louse, I'll soon show you how weak I am!'

Recollections of the dastardly treatment he had received from McCoy suddenly maddened Rashleigh, and though he knew nothing of the art of boxing, at which McCoy was expert, he rushed at the bushranger. At first it looked as though he would be knocked out despite his superior strength, but, managing to beat down the other's guard, he seized his head by the ears, pushed him backwards to the wall, against which he pounded the bushranger's skull. McCoy howled for mercy, bringing the turnkey into the cell to see what was wrong. Neither man answered his question, and the jailer then inquired which of them was named McCoy.

'You, is it?' he said with a smirk to the bushranger. 'What would you stand to have one of the lasses that were outside to spend the night with you?'

McCoy offered to pay the man a pound, which seemed to satisfy him, and he withdrew. As soon as it was quite dark the cell door opened, and the young woman who had always favoured McCoy came in with a basket on her arm, the screwsman following with a quantity of bedding.

'There's your sister, young fellow,' he said, dropping the bedding, 'and here's all the bedding stuff I can muster for the three of you, so you must do the best you can.'

He went out, carefully securing the fastenings of the door.

Rashleigh retired to a corner, while McCoy and his paramour talked in a low tone for some time. Presently a candle was lit and the young woman took food and two bottles of spirits from the basket, inviting Rashleigh to come over and share, which he abruptly declined to do.

'Why, I hope you ain't anyways offended with me,' she said. 'And if you and Sandy have had a few words and a scrap, that's nothing. Surely you can make it up again, especially as you haven't either of you got long to be together, or with anyone else, either.'

McCoy added his invitation to the girl's, and at length Rashleigh consented to share the meal, during which the girl remarked that she was reminded of a previous lover's last night on earth, which she had spent with him in Windsor lock-up, he being shot dead next morning in an attempt to escape. She was a type Rashleigh had never encountered, able to take quite calmly and as a matter of course the certainty that in a short while the man she had come to see would be hanged. She alluded frankly to his fate and urged him 'to die like a trump and split nothing.'

Rashleigh concluded that her visit was as much inspired by concern for her own and her women friends' safety, as by love of McCoy. She was very eager to be assured that there was no likelihood of either man betraying the fact that she and her family had harboured the bushrangers and received the property stolen from the Shannavans, part of which was then on her back. When she had been assured by McCoy that he would keep dumb about these things, she then tried to persuade him to speak up and clear Rashleigh of the charge against him by stating the truth about his position in Foxley's gang.

'I'm blowed if I'll do any such thing,' said McCoy with

THE MEMOIRS OF

an oath. 'No, no, Soph, let the crawling beggar die, then he can't tell any tales.'

The girl at once abandoned her entreaties, satisfied that she had won Rashleigh's friendliness by having made the suggestion, and thus assured herself that he would not betray her and her friends. They sat on until the whole of the two bottles of spirits were drunk, and then all three lay down to sleep.

In the morning the girl took a cheery farewell of McCoy, promising to follow him to Sydney in a day or two.

'Good-bye, young feller,' she said, shaking Rashleigh's hand. 'I hope yer won't bring anybody else into trouble, for that won't do yer any good. If yer must die, die like a man.'

Rashleigh assured her that he would never turn informer, and the girl departed.

Two days later the two prisoners reached Sydney jail, and joined the company of the offscourings of the worst sections of the criminal population. The authorities were concerned with nothing but the safe custody of their charges, and there was no discipline in the place except what would ensure this. Immediately Rashleigh and McCoy were admitted into the prisoners' room, they were set upon by a filthy mob of fellow-convicts and stripped naked of every stitch of clothing, except the dirty rags on their legs, which were soon to prevent the chafing of the fetters. Luckily Rashleigh had concealed his small stock of cash in these rags. After the plunderers had gone through all their pockets and taken everything of any value, some of their clothes were given back to them, and the two men were ironically declared free of His Majesty's jail.

Newgate had been bad enough, but it was clean and luxurious compared with the conditions in which Rashleigh now found himself. One hundred and twenty human beings

were crowded into a room about forty feet long and twenty wide. Most of the prisoners were filthy in body and mind, and unspeakable vices were practised without restraint, and as Rashleigh contemplated the possibility that if he were not hanged he would most likely have to spend the remainder of his life in this or a similar place, he sank into utter despair. One morning he was taking exercise in the allotted space in the gloomy prison-yard when he heard his name shouted by a turnkey, and he was led to the hall door.

Here he found McGuffin, accompanied by a young woman whose face was familiar. McGuffin's introduction helped his memory.

'This is my wife, young man, Miss Shannavan that was.'

'Yes, I am,' said Mrs. McGuffin eagerly, 'and I am come to see you, because I haven't forgotten the cruel knock you got from that wretch that's dead for trying to save me and my sister.'

She burst into tears at the memory of that awful night, and McGuffin, putting his arm round her, said to Rashleigh: 'We have brought a few things for your comfort. I did not see the blow you got of which my wife speaks, but I believe her, because I know that I shouldn't have got away from that blasted gang of scoundrels if you hadn't turned obstinate with Foxley. If I can do you any good on your trial, you can rely upon me doing it with pleasure.'

After they had gone, Rashleigh began to hope, as McGuffin's evidence was sure to be of some service to his case.

The day of the trial came at last. McCoy was placed in the dock first, and persisted in pleading guilty, roaring to the court: 'What's the sense of being humbugged by such a set of blasted old wretches as that judge and jury? They're going to hang me, anyhow, and I don't give a damn! The

only thing I'm sorry for is that I was so merciful when I was free. If I had killed a score or two more, they could only have "topped" me in the end.'

His flow of abuse was stopped with difficulty, and while the judge was passing sentence, McCoy repeatedly interrupted him in the coarsest language, and when the trial was over, he poured out a torrent of filth and obscenity, while four husky constables dragged him out of the court.

Rashleigh's case followed immediately. He was charged with being present, aiding and abetting in the commission of a robbery with violence, he being at the time a runaway convict.

The evidence of one of the men belonging to the hut on the Cumaroy was now taken, and was supported by that of McGuffin as to his apprehension. Rashleigh, called upon for his defence, related the manner in which he had at the outset been taken by the bushrangers, and called upon McGuffin to testify what he had seen in proof of his being only the bushrangers' unwilling and compelled agent. McGuffin recounted what had taken place at the Shannavan house, and swore to the fact that Rashleigh was not bearing arms at the time of the affray which led to his arrest.

The judge summed up and left it to the jury to decide whether it was possible that the prisoner could have been compelled to remain for so long a period with those lawless men, unless he wished to do so, and whether, in any event, he could not have escaped. After very brief consideration, the jury returned a verdict of guilty, upon which Rashleigh was affected much as he had been at his first trial on a capital charge.

Numbness came over his senses, so that he did not hear a word of the judge's eloquence in passing sentence, and he had lost all sense of time and place as he meekly followed

the turnkey and left the court. He remained in this entranced state for fourteen days, never being able to recall a single incident of that period. It was just blotted out of his memory. He came back to a full consciousness of life on the day fixed for his execution.

It was a morning of bright sunshine, when the chaplain came to the cell door to accompany him to the scaffold. As yet his mind was not functioning, but the sight of the hangman passing shocked him into understanding. He heard and comprehended at last what the chaplain was saying, and when the principal turnkey came and took him gently by the arm to lead him out he made no resistance.

He went out into the sunshine and looked for a few dazed moments at the blue sea and the shining country round Port Jackson; then the melancholy procession formed and moved forward. McCoy, supported by two Presbyterian ministers, went first, Rashleigh following in the company of the Protestant clergyman, with the friendly turnkey helping him. They were attended by the Sheriff and the officers of the jail and a few strangers who had come to witness the execution. With the chaplains, earnest in their exhortations, the prisoners entered the gallows-yard, around which stood files of prisoners, mostly heavily ironed, who were mustered to witness the hangings.

They reached the scaffold's foot, and the turnkey, who had been supporting the nerveless Rashleigh, left his side for a moment. He tottered and swayed, and was on the point of falling when the hangman caught his arm.

'Keep up your heart, old cock,' he said kindly. 'It will soon be over.'

This rough consolation, and the touch of the abhorred official, served to restore Rashleigh to some degree of strength. McCoy was by this time already on the platform,

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

and Rashleigh, nerving himself for a last effort to play the man, ran, rather than walked, up the flight of steps.

A few feet away was the prison wall, outside which was assembled a great crowd of townspeople who had come to the execution as to an entertainment. Their talk and laughter mingled with the words of the chaplains, busy persuading the condemned men of the hope of salvation. Ralph Rashleigh looked down at these people with dim eyes, without resentment, but wondering why they were there.

Glancing round he saw that the rope was already round McCoy's neck and, according to custom, the executioner was offering to shake his hand. Amazed, he saw McCoy throw the whole weight of his body forward against the hangman with such force that the functionary reeled and fell from the platform to the flagged pavement sixteen feet below.

'There, you b——r,' shouted McCoy, 'I hope I broke your blasted neck!'

A burst of applause broke from the assembled convicts, and then, without warning, the drop fell beneath McCoy.

The crash of the falling drop was the last sound that Rashleigh heard for many weeks. He returned to consciousness in a bed in the jail hospital, and learned that he had been reprieved through the intercession of Mrs. McGuffin, who had gone personally to the Governor and petitioned successfully on his behalf. He was told that his sentence had been commuted to three years' labour at the penal settlement of Newcastle.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was not until a second sessions had ended that Ralph Rashleigh was passed as fit to be sent to Newcastle.¹ The day came and he, with one hundred and thirty other miserable men, were heavily ironed and linked to a long chain, and marched through the streets under a strong guard to the public wharf, where a small colonial coasting vessel, named the *Alligator*, was lying alongside.

The prisoners were marched aboard and stripped naked before being sent down into the hold, the floor of which had been spread with shingle ballast. As each man got below he was secured by his fetters to a chain which was strongly fastened to the planking of the floor. It was impossible for the men to walk, or even to stand, the height from the floor of the hold to the upper deck being not more than three and one-half feet, and the hold was so small that, when all the prisoners had been crowded into it, they were squeezed so tight that they could only lie down upon their sides, body to body. The heat was intense, and the steam from the perspiring unfortunates rose through the hatchway in a cloud, as if the hold were afire.

Rashleigh had read about the conditions obtaining in the slave trade, and knew now that the horrors which he had seen described could not have been exaggerated. His only consolation, as he lay there sweating and nauseated, was that

¹ Governor Darling, under date July 26, 1831, to Viscount Goderich, in an official despatch, wrote:

"The Establishment at Newcastle has been totally reduced with the exception of the men attached to the Coal Mines and these will be immediately transferred to the Australian Agricultural Company, the Agent having lately signified that he should shortly be prepared to receive them."

An official return dated April 1, 1827, gives the number of convicts employed in the Newcastle coal mines at 266.

THE MEMOIRS OF

as the voyage was only one of a hundred miles this torment and defilement would not last long.

The *Alligator* weighed anchor and cleared harbour with a fair wind, but once out to sea, ran into a fresh gale in which she pitched violently, shipping water. The waves, breaking over the sides, washed through the hatchway into the hold, cooling the fevered wretches; but as the seas remained big it was not long before the hold was awash, and the prisoners were obliged to kneel or crouch in order to keep their heads above water. The weather remained rough for several hours, until the captain was forced by a change of wind to put into Broken Bay, under his lee, where the pumps were got working and the hold made habitable again.

The voyage lasted forty-eight hours, and during the whole time the ration for each man was half a mouldy biscuit and a drink of water. The one hundred and thirty men remained fettered to the chains without a break of any kind, lying helplessly in their own excrement in a state which would have been considered insanitary for cattle.

Filthy and stinking, the prisoners were at last landed at Newcastle, where they performed with joy the compulsory ablutions in the sea, after which their clothing was served out to them. They were then paraded and inspected by the military commandant, a man of such ruthless severity that he had earned the title of King of the Coal River.¹ The

¹ James Mudie, of Castle Forbes, N.S.W., from 1822 to 1836, made the following statement before the Select Committee on Transportation in 1837: Chairman: 'At what period are you speaking of?'

James Mudie: 'I should think it must be about 1825-26. Newcastle had then ceased to be a penal settlement, but there was an individual there who acted as what they call a commandant, he was a military officer; I was walking upon the jetty one Sunday morning, and this commandant came down; he was going into a boat to go up the river; one of the men was absent, he inquired where he was, and they said he had just gone a little way; in fact the man was

inspection over, the men were broken into groups and dispatched to various places of labour, Rashleigh with seventy others being drafted for employment in the old coal-mine, so called to distinguish it from another shaft which had recently been sunk.

A grim-visaged overseer received them at the pithead, and called his clerk 'to take the likenesses' of the new victims of his oppression. The clerk was a miserable, half-starved, browbeaten creature, who did his duty trembling with fear at the threats of his superior; after which the men were lowered singly in a bucket to the bottom of the shaft.

Rashleigh gazed into the gloom, full of wonder at the strangeness of the scene. Seven low passages opened out from the space at the foot of the shaft, dimly lit by small lamps; but at the end of each tunnel was a blaze of light. In the glow, like some glimpse of inferno, he saw groups of men working feverishly, who redoubled their exertions at sight of the hated overseer who had brought down the new hands. As this brute stepped out of the bucket, he criticized the manner in which a wagon had been filled by a gang who had just dragged it along to be unloaded. Cursing and abusing them, he set upon the men in charge, with a stout cudgel, and in a few moments had knocked every man down, and then beaten them until they rose again, driving them back to refill the wagon down the passage along which they had just come.

then in sight, and came up running, when the commandant abused the man, and called him a damned scoundrel, and said, "Where have you been, and why were you not in attendance," and he kicked him and in fact knocked him down, and he then ordered them to send for the flogger to flog him; the people were at that time in church, and it occasioned a considerable deal of talk; he ordered the man to be flogged, and he was flogged.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

He came back, out of breath, and, dividing the newcomers up into parties of sixteen, gave each gang a wagon. He then led the way along one of the galleries into a great open space, where large coal fires were burning, by the light of which, added to that of their lamps, miners were busy hacking out masses of coal. The overseer stopped at an immense heap, and called the overseer in charge of this section.

'Take these new chums in hand, and set 'em on,' he ordered shortly.

Their work was to fill the wagons with coal, drag them to the opening at the shaft's foot, and tip out the contents according to the directions of the man in charge there. They set to work immediately, and continued without rest under the blows and threats of their taskmaster until night, when each man received a small portion of boiled maize grain, a morsel of salt beef, and water. They slept naked in any part of the workings, the heat being so excessive that any clothing or covering only added to the misery of life. No bedding was provided, but those who were not too exhausted to make the effort could scrape together enough dust to make a comfortable sleeping-place. The convict-miners remained underground the whole week, and on Saturday afternoons were taken to the surface to wash themselves and their clothing in sea water. When their clothes were dry they were marched to the convict barracks, and confined there until Monday morning.

Bathing in the sea on his first Saturday afternoon, Rashleigh noticed that there was scarcely one of the older miners whose backs or buttocks were free from marks of the lash. He remarked to one of the men that it seemed as if punishment was plentiful at Newcastle.

'Aye, that's something there's no lack of, anyway,'

answered the miner with a laugh. 'And so you will know, soon; for to-morrow is pay-day.'

Rashleigh asked no more questions, and soon, with about five hundred others, he was marched off and shut up in a great room in the barracks, where they were left to pass the night on the floor. At dawn on Sunday, the hoarse shouts of a barrack officer aroused the men, who were turned out into the yard and drawn up around a series of triangles, used for securing men who were to be flogged. A clerk sat at a table, and four scourgers stood beside the triangles, each with a number of whips laid out on a bench. The significance of this muster was clear to Rashleigh, and he waited dejectedly while the clash of arms and the roll of a drum heralded the approach of the commandant. An opening was made in the ranks of the convicts and the official dressed in full regimentals, attended by the sergeant's guard, marched in and took his seat at the table.

'Dash my old duds,' whispered a fellow next to Rashleigh, 'look out, my lads! The cove has got on his fighting-jacket, so it's going to be a regular field-day.'

The clerk opened his book, and the overseer of the miners was called. He made a loutish reverence to the commandant, and handed in his punishment list.

'Charles Chattey!' shouted one of the scourgers, acting as announcer.

A little duck-legged Londoner stood forward.

'What's he been doing?' demanded the commandant.

'Neglecting his work, your honour,' answered the overseer.

'One hundred lashes.'

The little Cockney was stripped and tied to one of the triangles, while three other convicts were 'tried' in as many minutes, and triced up to the other triangles, naked. At a

THE MEMOIRS OF

signal the drummer began to tap his drum slowly, marking time for the lashes, inflicted by the strongest men among the convicts who had sunk low enough to volunteer for the office of flagellators. These men were held in contempt and execration by their fellow-convicts, and distrusted by the authorities, who always ordered a constable to stand behind each scourger with orders to lay on lustily with a stick if the scourger seemed to relax in the severity of the lashes which he laid on to the culprit at his triangle.

The orgy of punishment continued hour after hour until not less than fifty men had been lashed, none with less than seventy-five stripes, the commandant taking obvious pleasure in stimulating the jaded scourgers with threats of punishment. When, some time after nine o'clock, the convicts were dismissed, they were served with breakfast of boiled corn, and half a pound of indifferently cured meat, which comprised the full daily allowance of each man.

Rashleigh observed that, in these so-called examinations, the ceremony of the oath was dispensed with, and that the poor wretches charged with crimes were not so much as called upon for their defence. The convict overseers simply stated their complaints, which were assumed thereupon to be proved, and sentence of lashes was automatically passed. Justice and humanity were alike denied them.

For another week Rashleigh continued his gruelling task of loading and carting coal below, goaded by blows and threats from the overseers; came up with the rest on Saturday and witnessed the infliction of four thousand lashes on the Sunday. The third week he was transferred to a party whose job was to deliver at the pit's mouth daily a stated quantity of coal, and, failing delivery, to be flogged until they reached the required standard. He passed nine unvarying months of miserable toil, receiving in all six hundred

and fifty lashes for offences mainly invented by the caprice of his overseers, until he was, at the usual Sunday ceremony, haled before the commandant, charged by the principal overseer of the mine with incorrigible laziness. By custom, and without any opportunity of defence, he received a hundred lashes, and was ordered to be sent on the following day to work naked in the lime-burners' gang¹ across the river.

While Rashleigh was spending the remainder of the day in the charge of a jailer, an incident occurred which emphasized the sadistic brutality of the commandant who had condemned him, and revealed the despotism which governed the lives of convicts at Newcastle.

The commandant was allotted six milch cows for the supply of his household, and it was customary to give the buttermilk to the pigs. He employed a young convict boy whose work was to supply Government House with fuel, and the young scamp had formed the habit of waiting about until the skimmed milk was poured into the troughs and joining the swine in drinking it, the milk being a luxury

¹ James Mudie, of Castle Forbes, N.S.W., from 1822 to 1836, made the following statement before the Select Committee on Transportation in 1837:

Chairman: 'What was the punishment for criminals at the penal settlement at Newcastle?'

James Mudie: 'Independent of flogging, they had a place they called the lime-burners, about a mile from Newcastle, across the river, on the opposite side of the river Hunter; there the men of the very worst description were sent to burn lime; they used to pick shells upon the beach and burn lime, and these men it would be impossible to describe in consequence of the depravity of their appearance; you cannot conceive anything like it; I went there merely as a matter of curiosity to see them; but that rested entirely with the commandant; if a convict overseer went to him and complained of a man, and told him he could make nothing of him; in fact if he got up a complaint against him, and recommended him to be sent to what is called the lime-burners, then he was sent there as a matter of course.'

compared with the normal convict diet. The pigs began to get lean, while the lad grew fat and round as a butt, and the commandant's lady suspected that the milk was surreptitiously diverted from her animals. She therefore began to carry the milk to the troughs herself, but, assured though she now was that the food reached the pigs, they failed nevertheless to thrive.

It was on this day of Rashleigh's last punishment as a miner that accident gave solution to the mystery. The commandant, returning from his flagellations, was arrested by an outcry in the pigsty and looked over the fence to see what was wrong. There he saw someone lying full length in the sty alternately lapping up the swill and keeping off an angry sow with vigorous kicks. The commandant went purple with anger, and raced off to the house, called for his wife to come after him, and rushed back to the piggery. He was so out of breath with exertion that, when his wife joined him, he could only point at the prone figure of the young thief, lying there still in oblivious enjoyment of his meal.

'Oh, you scoundrell!' screamed the lady, and, as the detected lad raised his head, the commandant roared out for a constable to fetch the scourgers.

In a very few minutes six men, carrying their cats and triangles hastened to the spot. Jack, the culprit, was immediately tied up.

'Give him a hundred!' roared the commandant. 'Hi!' he added, as the scourger prepared to lay on after having taken off only the boy's frock, 'take off his shirt as well, damn you.'

He then ordered another flogger to stand behind the first, with orders to lash the scourger if he did not do his duty thoroughly. Jack endured the first four or five lashes without wince or cry, and the commandant fairly danced with rage.

'Harder, sir, harder yet!' he roared, and ordered the second scourger to flog the first.

Still the fuel boy endured his punishment in silence; at which the commandant seemed to go quite mad. He ordered a third scourger to flog the second, still without effect upon the boy's grit; and in the end he had six scourgers in a file scourging each other and the lad, while he himself lashed at the sixth man with his riding-whip. These extraordinary circumstances prevented anyone from counting the number of lashes, and the brutal comedy only ended when the King of Coal River dropped his whip from exhaustion.

The wood boy was forthwith sentenced to work with the lime-burners, where he met Rashleigh and told him the tale.

Next morning, in fulfilment of his sentence, Rashleigh was stripped naked, except that he was allowed to wear part of his shirt as a decency shield, and was loaded with another pair of leg-irons in addition to those which had manacled him since his arrival at Newcastle. He was placed on board a lime punt, in charge of a constable, and transferred to the north shore of the Coal River, a sterile and forbidding tract made up of hummocks of sand scantily patched with couch grass and stunted bushes. The naked misery of the lime-burners was even more extreme than that of the miners, on whose side of the river the barrenness was at least relieved by one or two gardens.

The lime-burners' camp consisted of two lines of hovels, enclosed by a tall palisade made of strips of the outer coat of the cabbage palm. The convicts here were the exiles and outcasts of the criminals from whose ranks they derived, only the weak, the vicious and the untameable being sent here from the horrors of Newcastle. As Rashleigh arrived they were busily employed loading boats with marine shells, which were burned, but not slaked, for making lime. This

loading was done by means of baskets which were filled and carried through the surf on the convicts' backs to the boats, into which the shells were tipped.

Rashleigh was at once given a basket and ordered to join the rest. He appealed to the overseer to be allowed to do some other kind of work, urging the soreness of his back, raw from a hundred lashes yesterday, as an excuse for his request. The overseer affected sympathy and asked to be shown the sore place, and when Rashleigh gingerly peeled off the piece of rough rag which he had secured as a dressing, the brute in charge flung into the sore a handful of quicklime, and cut him sharply across the spot with his stick.

'Get to your work, you blasted, crawling caterpillar,' he shouted, 'or I'll soon serve you ten times worse than that!'

Rashleigh took up his basket and waded out into the salt water, which set the lime sizzling in his festering wound, while the brine seemed to eat into the raw cuts left by the lash. Almost mad with the pain, he was nevertheless kept steadily on the run until about ten o'clock at night, when the last of the boats were loaded, and the worn-out, hungry wretches, who had been in and out of the water at this work for sixteen hours, were at last allowed to go to their comfortless hovels and rest. One or two of the hundred and fifty men had somehow managed to make themselves bedding of dried seaweed, but the vast majority slept on hard wooden slabs which were the substitute for beds.

The living conditions of the emaciated wretches who were condemned to work at the lime-burners' camp were incredibly severe at this time. The only clothing which was permitted did not vary in the heat of summer or the bitterness of winter, and consisted of the rag apron worn for the sake of decency. Every man wore not less than two sets of leg-irons — many had four and six as punishment for

excessive delinquencies — and at all hours, governed only by the state of the tides, they were compelled to work breast-high in the sea in order to unload their baskets in the boats which drew about three to four feet of water. In the summer their bodies were peeled of skin, and in the winter they were frozen and frost-bitten; huddling together at night on the floor of their sleeping-hovels in order to generate some warmth. Their weekly allowance of food was three and a half pounds of maize in cob, and an equal weight of ill-cured salt beef, and even this was reduced by the commissariat overseers, who stole freely from the common stock. The convicts were powerless to complain of these peculations by their immediate superiors, who held the power to punish them with lawless fury. There were no stated hours for labour, it being a compulsion on the overseers to work the men as long as they could be made to stand, and it was usual for the convicts to be driven for fifteen hours a day.

The crown of the lime-burners' misery, however, was the treatment meted out to them on the periodical visits of the commandant of the district during his tours of the out-stations. Rashleigh had learnt at Newcastle the almost insane devotion of this despot to the infliction of pain upon the wretches under him, and he guessed that the severity of punishment would increase on this side of the river, inhabited as it undoubtedly was by the most incorrigible ruffians in the ranks of the convicts. The commandant always came with two scourgers, each of whom carried three or four 'cat-o'-nine-tails,' and his method on arrival was to go from one working party to another, pick out any poor exhausted devil who was working less industriously than his mates, tie him to the nearest fence and have him lashed with never less than fifty strokes. Their backs running with

THE MEMOIRS OF

blood, his victims were at once ordered to resume their work.

To Rashleigh it seemed that this man's temper was completely perverted. Scenes and sounds which aroused pity and loathing in any ordinary man were a source of fiendish delight to him, and it was a habit of his suddenly to spring at the scourger and belabour him with his riding-whip in order to make him flog the tied convict with harder blows. His especial pleasure was to select men from the boat-loaders' gangs, and have them flogged until their backs were raw, so that he could enjoy the sight of the writhings and the sound of the shrieks as he compelled them to place their baskets of lime on their bleeding backs and wade out into the stinging salt water. His eyes would dilate with satisfaction at the pain caused by the lime slaking in the blood of the wounds. Several times during his stay there, Rashleigh saw men drown themselves before the eyes of their torturer, whose comment was always to the effect that it would save the Government rope and the hangman a job.

This particular commandant was, in a sense, a victim of the system of extreme corporal punishment which was in common practice during that period. Flogging was a recognized form of punishment in the Army and Navy, and it was not many years since the sentence of flogging a seaman round the fleet had been abolished. He had almost certainly been selected for his present post by reason of his record as one of the most effective disciplinarians in the Army; and, apart from his unnatural joy in witnessing these floggings, he sincerely believed that the only sure means of controlling the two thousand desperadoes under his charge was to break their bodies as well as their minds. His principle was to terrorize them, and he never hesitated, when an insufficient number of delinquents were paraded, to select

promiscuously numbers of unoffending convicts whom he thrashed in anticipation of crimes they were, in his view, almost certain to commit in the future.

His method was in most cases successful. The men of the lime-burners' camp were always existing just above starvation line, were continuously worked beyond their debilitated strength, and their minds were steadily brutalized by the punitive system which controlled their every minute. In three months the vast majority were successfully broken in strength and cowed in spirit; shells of humanity governed by an overmastering instinct for food. Many men were perpetually wailing and weeping for food, devouring anything masticable; and on more than one occasion Rashleigh saw poor wretches picking out grains from the excrement of oxen, devouring the sullied food with eagerness.

There was danger for any man who was fortunate enough to receive a soft bone with his meat allowance. The greedy, envious eyes of his companions would watch him as he voraciously ground it in his teeth and when, his jaws wearied, he flung down a portion of the bone, there would be a wild scramble for it. On the second day of his internment Rashleigh learnt how terrible a thing hunger could be.

He had flung down a bone, and in the scuffle that ensued for its possession two men grabbed different ends of the bone, and as neither would admit that the other had priority of claim, Rashleigh was asked to decide who should have it. He suggested dividing it, but the famished wretches would not agree, and at last he decided in favour of one of them. The man who had lost the bone, looking murder at Rashleigh and the man with the prize, fell away from the group, while the possessor partly crushed the bone between two stones, and sat down with his back to a shed and began to gnaw it.

THE MEMOIRS OF

Rashleigh stared at the man in pity, wondering how long it would be before he were reduced to a similar state of bestial acquisitiveness, when he saw the second man standing over the eater with a great iron shell-rake raised ready to strike. Rashleigh shouted a warning and sprang forward to prevent the blow, but was too late. As he sprang the rake crashed on to the head of the unsuspecting man with a force which crushed the skull and splattered the brains around.

'Ha, ha, I've got it now!' cried the murderer, snatching up the half-gnawed bone, covered with the blood and brains of his victim, cramming it into his mouth, and holding out his hands to the overseer who came running up to handcuff him. His hunger was appeased for the moment: what did punishment and hanging matter!

Rashleigh was appalled to learn, on questioning his mates about this episode, that such atrocities were by no means rare; and one of the men – who had come over with him on the ship from England – warned him never to save any portion of his food for another meal, as there were many among the older, brutalized convicts who would not hesitate to kill him for a handful of maize or a bit of rotten meat.

One day, soon after this incident, Rashleigh was out with a gang cutting timber for fuel for the lime-kilns, when one of the oxen yoked to a fuel cart fell down from exhaustion. The driver tried with blows and curses to make it get up, but the emaciated beast was beyond responding to either, and was unyoked and left to die, the remaining ox dragging the cart to the kilns. Rashleigh and the rest of the gang had watched from their concealment in the scrub, and no sooner was the cart out of sight than they rushed forward, killed the beast outright with their axes and cut away every eatable part of the carcass. They quickly concealed the meat and cleaned

their axes before the overseer arrived with the bullock-driver, and looked on with glee at the astonishment of the two men who found only the head, feet and entrails remaining of what half an hour before had been a whole if lean ox. All search failed to reveal the hiding-place of the meat, and no proof could be discovered that Rashleigh's gang had had anything to do with the theft, and they were thus able to enjoy the luxury of chewing the raw, tough meat surreptitiously for days.

Rashleigh, before he had been broken by these dreadful conditions, used to wonder why the convicts did not concert together in a mutiny, even if the attempt should mean the death of many of them, rather than endure this existence, than which death could not be worse. Suicide, except by drowning under the maddening pain of lime and sea water in raw wounds, was as unknown here as it had been in the harsh, but less terrible, conditions on Emu Plains. The men, desperate in misery as they were, were too broken in spirit either to mutiny or make away with themselves. The only manifestation of courage was that which resulted from men being driven nearly mad by hunger. His guarded inquiries as to the chances of fomenting a mutiny speedily taught him that one great factor against possible success was that there was an utter lack of mutual trust among the men. Schemes for escape were frequently planned, but nearly always, before the time for action came, one or other of the convicts in the plot would turn informer and denounce those who had trusted him. An informer could usually be sure of reward of some kind from the authorities, and it was a practice of some men to inaugurate attempts at escape, with the deliberate intention of betraying his comrades, in the hope of himself being appointed overseer, or to some other easy post.

CHAPTER XIX

ONE day, shortly after the feast of the ox was ended, Rashleigh was one of a number of convicts who were sent to cut a quantity of mangrove timber, which was destined for Sydney to be used for the manufacture of stone-cutters' mallets. The selection of the right growths made it necessary for the members of the party to separate and wander about in the swamp, frequently up to their necks in water, until they hit upon likely trees. In the course of this work, Rashleigh strayed right up to the bank of the river, where he was thrilled to see a boat which lay dry upon a low sandbank, canted a little on one side. He could see no one in or near the boat.

This spot was hidden from observation by a projecting point of land, mangrove-covered: so Rashleigh crept quietly forward and looked into the boat. He saw a man lying fast asleep in the bottom, and noticed that the interior of the small vessel was much roomier than he had guessed at first sight. There was room under each side of the half-decks for two or three people to sleep comfortably, and it seemed to be well stocked with provisions and other supplies. The mast, with the sail wrapped round it loosely, lay along the thwarts, and under the sail he saw the butts of several muskets. With a quickening of heart-beats, Rashleigh saw his chance to escape.

Swiftly and unobtrusively he went back and told some of his companions of the miraculous opportunity, and all of them decided to take the risk. The excitement seemed to warm their blood and to nerve their gaunt frames, as, bright-eyed, they followed Rashleigh to the spot where the boat lay, its occupant still asleep. Without pause, they heaved the boat off the bank into the water, drew up the anchor and

began at once to drift in the swift stream towards the harbour mouth. They stepped the mast and set the sail, which bellied in the fresh breeze, standing over towards the southern shore to place an island between themselves and the lime-burners' camp. As soon as they had reached this cover, they awakened the boatman, who was terrified at finding himself surrounded by over half a dozen gaunt, moving skeletons, their naked bodies smeared with mud and filth, and their faces and heads overgrown with matted hair. One of the runaways, who had armed himself with a musket, ordered the poor fellow to strip ; and his clothes were at once donned by another of the fugitives, named Roberts, who, knowing something of sailing, had been selected to navigate the boat. The remainder lay down below the gunwale, lest their nakedness should attract the attention of any observers, who would at once set the garrison in pursuit.

The helmsman, judging that he was sufficiently far from Lime-burners' Bay, recrossed the harbour to keep as great a distance as possible between boat and settlement. The bells of the town began ringing for the convicts' dinner hour, and, hearing them, the fugitives realized that most of the inhabitants of Newcastle would be indoors at their meals, as the boat sailed by the town, thus greatly reducing the danger of being seen.

The wind remained favourable. In answer to the hail of questions from his supine companions, the helmsman was able to report that they were passing the wharf of the coal-mines, and that everything seemed to be going well. Soon they were abreast of Nobby's Island, a bluff rock set almost centrally in the mouth of Hunter's River.

'Blow, good breeze,' muttered the steersman, 'another mile and all is safe.'

The excited man had scarcely spoken when 'Boat-ahoy!

THE MEMOIRS OF

was thundered out by someone on the island. Forgetting prudence in the anxiety of hearing the peremptory hail, two of the naked runaways raised themselves above the gunwale to see who was accosting them.

The man on the island, a military officer on a sea-fowl shooting expedition, saw them and realized what was happening.

'Haul down your sail,' he roared, 'or I'll fire into your boat.'

The fugitives paid no heed nor made any answer to this order and threat, the man at the helm holding the boat steadily on her course.

'Hallo! Shore, ahoy! Help! Mutiny!'

As the officer shouted, he levelled his fowling-piece and fired, ineffectually as it proved, the shots spattering the water well astern.

Concealment being now useless, the whole party stood up, and Rashleigh saw that the whole settlement was by this time in commotion. The report of the officer's gun had roused the sentries posted at the signal stations, who discharged their muskets, the sound of which brought the dreaded commandant at a run from Government House. He leapt on his horse and galloped down to the sea beach, where, Rashleigh judged by his gestures, he was characteristically cursing a party of men who were busily launching a boat, urging them to make better speed.

A party of soldiers came down the hill at a run towards their chief officer, and Rashleigh saw another detachment, which had apparently made for the jail at the first alarm, make their way on the high ground behind Nobby's Island. Alarm bells were ringing continuously, and the two cannon which stood on the patch of green in front of Government House were hastily loaded and discharged at the boat, one

of the balls whizzing by just above the mast, after which it appeared to ricochet from wave to wave, finally burying itself in the sand of the northern shore.

As his gaze came back from following the course of the ball, Rashleigh noticed a small boat, containing two people, put off from the islet and start in pursuit of them. They were the officer who had first given the alarm and, evidently, his servant, but it was clear that they had only one firearm with them, and that almost certainly the fowling-piece which the officer had taken with him for duck-shooting. The two men held on with the chase, either ignorant of the fact that the fugitives were fully armed, or pluckily indifferent to this handicap. Their boat being smaller and built for speed, began to gain rapidly on the heavier one in which the convicts stood, six of them now armed with the muskets which they had found on board. Rashleigh hailed the officer and begged him, as he valued his life, to keep off and give up the chase, calling his attention to the six pieces levelled on his boat. The young ensign must have felt that he had gone too far to retract with honour, and his reply to Rashleigh's well-meant advice was to discharge his piece, hitting the steersman in the left arm, incapacitating it. The six armed convicts fired simultaneously and the rash young soldier fell bleeding overboard. His servant had perforce to abandon the chase and devote himself to the rescue of his superior, so that the convicts were able to turn their attention to their other pursuers.

The nearest of these was a whaleboat, propelled by sixteen oars, and carrying also a large sail. Rashleigh was terrified at the speed she was making, and the certainty of escape which had been buoying him up began to dwindle. The commandant, bareheaded and mouthing curses and promises alternately, stood in the bows, a musket in his hand, which

he brought to his shoulder every few minutes as if he were unable to contain his rage until he was within effective shooting distance of his quarry. He did not fire, however, contenting himself with shaking his fist at the convicts and hurling imprecations after them.

Three other boats were coming on, almost abreast, in the wake of the commandant's, all containing soldiers, and two of them carrying sails to help the oarsmen. The third boat was quickly recognized by the fugitives, by reason of its peculiar rig, as the dreaded pilot boat, known as the swiftest boat in Newcastle, a reputation it maintained now by rapidly overhauling the other pursuing boats.

About five miles ahead on the northerly course which the runaway steersman was holding still, despite his wounded arm, was the extreme point of the land which forms the bay into which Hunter River empties itself. From this promontory a chain of rocks stretch seaward for nearly a mile, visible at low tide and indicated by surf and breakers in roughish weather. This day the tide was full, but even to Rashleigh's inexperienced eye the danger of the steersman holding to his course right into the teeth of the reef was obvious. Rashleigh, appalled at what seemed to be the inevitable consequences, turned and hinted to Roberts, at the helm, that a better course would be to hold out to the open sea.

'I know best what I'm about,' answered Roberts calmly. 'I'm doing all for the best.'

Accepting this assurance, Rashleigh turned to see how the pursuers were faring, and noticed that the pilot boat paused for a few moments alongside the larger boat, took the commandant aboard, and then came on in pursuit again at a great pace. The breeze was steadily freshening as they got farther from the lee of the land, and the boiling surf of the

reef was only a very short distance ahead when suddenly Roberts roared out, 'Lay down, every man.' He himself gave point to the urgency of his command by flinging himself upon the half deck, retaining his grip of the tiller, and keeping his eye fixed on a hill that lay directly ahead in their course.

A volley of musketry came from the pilot boat, some of the bullets tearing through the fugitives' sails, followed by the voice of the commandant, thundering imperiously:

'Strike your sail, you infernal scoundrels, and surrender, or we'll run you down.'

Roberts raised himself to his knee, gave the tiller to another man, whose musket he took, and looked carefully to the flint and priming.

'Now, my lads,' he said, 'if we were once inside that reef we should be safe. There is but one passage through it, and I don't believe there is a man in any of those boats that knows the course, except myself. We must stop that pilot boat somehow, if we can. I'll aim at that damned tyrant in the bows, and the rest of you fire at the slings of her sails. If any of your shots tell they must stop. Now, say when you are ready.'

He waited until he got the signal that they were all ready.

'Now, the slings, mind,' he cried. 'Let fly!'

As the smoke of the volley cleared Rashleigh saw the brutal commandant stagger, drop his musket into the sea, and sink into the outstretched arms of an attendant boatman. The after-sail fluttered for a moment in the breeze and then came down over the heads of the steersman and the soldiers standing in the stern sheets. The pilot boat yawed out of her course, which just saved her from piling up on a rock not an oar's length from her bows.

The runaway boat was now in the thick of the breakers

that leaped, foamed and lashed about her, and Rashleigh felt that the end had come. No boat could live through such a sea with rocks a mere boat's breadth away on either hand. Roberts caught the tiller from his substitute and steered her by a course taken from shore marks through the opening in the reef into comparative safety. On their left lay the mainland, on their right the open sea, and, at the relief which he felt, Rashleigh turned and spontaneously congratulated Roberts on his courage and masterly handling of the boat. The man replied, with a smile, 'We shall see directly how the sogers get through it, for, by George, they are going to try it on.'

Rashleigh turned and saw the sixteen-oared boat making for the opening in the reef, and could not but admire the courage of her crew, who pulled at their oars unflinchingly in the turmoil of surf. For a little the boat made good way through the passage, then a wild cry rose from all aboard her, followed by the noise of crashing timbers as she was battered on the rocks. Pitiful cries for help filled the air above the noise of the breakers. Roberts looked sardonically across the boisterous tract of sea.

'Aye,' he said, as if to himself, 'I thought some of you would cool your courage there.'

Then he sat himself down composedly, the tiller in his hand and asked one of his companions to bind up the wound in his left arm; while Rashleigh looked back and watched the remaining boats come up and apply themselves to the rescue of the men in the water. When this was done the settlement boats pulled round the reef to the open sea, but by the time they had rounded the reef they were scarcely visible to the convicts. Feeling now comparatively safe, they set about preparing a meal of the provisions with which the boat was plentifully stocked. The man who had been in charge of her

told them that the boat had been equipped in Sydney for two wealthy gentlemen who had recently come from England to settle in the colony. They had been bound on a trip up Hunter River to select land and had gone ashore at Newcastle to spend the day with the commandant, who had sent off his gig with the invitation as they were going up-river.

The convicts sat in to the best meal that any of them had eaten for long, and then held a consultation as to what their future plans should be. It was at last agreed that they should run along the coast to the north, as Rashleigh remembered having read that Captain Bligh and his boat's crew had taken that course after the famous mutiny of the *Bounty*, a British man-of-war, in the South Seas. The convicts' hope was that they would reach one of the Dutch settlements in the Indian Archipelago, where they hoped to pass for shipwrecked mariners. This plan was kept secret from their prisoner, whom they put ashore, directing him to follow the shore, which would bring him to the side of the harbour opposite Newcastle.

Rashleigh found freedom so pleasant that he slept only an hour or two that night, preferring to sit in the stern with Roberts talking over their plans and problems. After a while he persuaded Roberts to take a spell of sleep, and leave to him the steering of the boat. Before turning in, the steersman gave Rashleigh a rudimentary lesson in navigation, directing him to keep the boat's head towards a certain star, and to rouse all the men if the wind should alter or fall, and especially if any breakers appeared.

During those pleasant night hours Rashleigh surveyed the probabilities of a successful outcome to their venturesome voyage. The example of Captain Bligh's exploit filled him with hope. What Bligh could do in an ill-provisioned open boat, they could most certainly do in a better-found,

THE MEMOIRS OF

half-decked vessel, well supplied with food and water, and carrying fishing tackle. They needed not to lose sight of land, and so could always obtain a fresh supply of water, should they run out of what they had aboard. There was, of course, the danger of armed pursuit by one of the Government cutters which frequently put in at Newcastle; and it was certain that the wounded commandant would employ every resource at his disposal to effect their capture. Again it was questionable whether there was any safe passage through the great reef which shut them in this great inlet; and even if there was such a passage, it was not unlikely that pursuing boats might be waiting there to intercept them. At last Rashleigh wearied of the probabilities and contented himself with enjoying his liberty while he had it.

At dawn, having lost the star by which to steer, he called Roberts, who examined the shore carefully and the lofty mountains looming in the background.

'We've made a capital run,' he said gleefully. 'We are beyond my knowledge of the coast, and that extends at least a hundred miles north of Newcastle.'

As the light increased and the early haze dissipated, they saw that the pilot-boat had continued the pursuit, and was now nearly abreast of them, on the far side of the reef, about a mile and a half distant. Ahead, the thunder of breakers warned them that they were approaching the end of the inlet, and to add to their discomfiture the breeze lessened rapidly and finally died away, leaving them in a dead calm. They pulled the boat into shoal water among mangrove bushes, and anchored.

The actions of the men in the pilot-boat were disturbing. They had now taken to the oars, and were rowing slowly along the reef as if searching for a passage through it. The convicts, fearing that their pursuers might find a way in,

took everything out of the boat and buried it in the sand above high-water mark. Then, as Rashleigh's suggestion, they filled the boat and sank her in shallow water, having first unstepped the mast: by which device they hoped to puzzle their pursuers and possibly throw them altogether off the scent.

Each man had retained a small stock of food, a musket and some ammunition, and the party now set out to penetrate a dense thicket, through which they struggled with great difficulty, until at the end of about a mile they came to a hill from which they could see the ocean. Their pursuers were not to be seen beyond the reef, and they concluded that a passage had been found, and that the pilot-boat was exploring the inlet for signs of the fugitives.

CHAPTER XX

THE party of convicts, which consisted of six men besides Rashleigh and Roberts, had begun to look upon the steersman, whose capacity alone had made escape possible, as their captain and leader.

The six men were in the main a tough and desperate gang. There was McClashin, a native of Belfast, who had earned an unenviable reputation among the convicts because he had, to save his own life, turned informer against four other men who were engaged with him in a robbery, with the result that they had all been hanged. Phelim Hennessey, a Tipperary man, had been transported for life for a crime then common in Ireland known as 'carding a tithe proctor.' He had used to boast of his bloody deeds done with the cool relish of the naturally bloodthirsty; and he had been suspected of three murders since his arrival in the colony, and had been transferred to Newcastle for a ruffianly assault upon an overseer. The remaining four men – Perkins, Shaw, Hanlon and Owen – were neither better nor worse than the average run of convicts who had conducted themselves in such a way as to be finally assigned to the lime-burners' hell.

Roberts had been a Nottingham boatman, who had been transported for the demolition of machinery. He had, on arrival, been employed on one of the Government boats at Sydney, and had been sentenced to seven years at Newcastle for attempting to escape from the colony.

These were the men who stood throughout the day anxiously watching the sea for signs of their pursuers. It was not until sundown that they at last saw the pilot-boat standing out to sea towing the boat they had so cunningly sunk that morning. Their mortification at seeing the means of their escape from the colony ignominiously disappearing

from view turned into an outcry against Rashleigh, who had suggested the sinking of the vessel. He met their onset coolly, asking them in a contemptuous tone why they themselves had not hit upon a better method of disposing of the boat. They all accepted his retort in silence, except Hennessey, who swore that it had been his opinion all along that the only way would have been to fight a passage through the reef, despite the soldiers. Roberts turned to him calmly.

‘If you think we can beat that lot on the pilot-boat,’ he said, ‘it’s not too late to have a bellyful of fighting now. You can bet your boots that if we go down to the beach and show ourselves, the redcoats won’t be backward at coming to have a slap at us.’

This silenced Hennessey, and the men fell to the discussion of the immediate problem of what should be done now.

McClashin, Hanlon and Hennessey were for turning inland until they came upon a settled part of Hunter River, and then, after robbing the settlers in the Wallis Plains neighbourhood, to go southward and join one of the bands of bushrangers who were terrorizing the neighbourhood of the Hawkesbury River. Afterwards, said McClashin, they could seize some vessel at the mouth of the river, and carry out their original plan of going to Timor Coupang.

Rashleigh, his detestation of the bushrangers’ life still warm, argued strongly against this project, and proposed that they should persevere even now in continuing along the beach whether or not the crew of the pilot-boat had found their stores. If they did, however, find any of the hidden tools, he maintained that they would be able to construct a serviceable double canoe from the first cedars they came across, and would thus be able to proceed on their northward journey without, as McClashin had proposed, making a

journey overland of five hundred miles to begin it all over again.

The undecided men waited to hear what suggestion Roberts had to make, and it was obvious from their manner that the majority would willingly fall in with any plan he suggested.

‘Our way lies north,’ he said, at last, with decision. ‘If only one man will go with me, I’ll take the beach for it. But I think those of you who want to go the other way are fools, as you’re sure to be grabbed before you get half the distance you’re talking about. No, here we are so far on our journey. We have the seaside, and we can’t starve there as long as there’s fish in the water. Besides, I’ve heard there’s plenty of wrecked ships on this shore; and there’s a chance we may find as good, or even a better, boat than the one we’ve lost.’

The three men who had expressed no opinion at once agreed to follow Roberts’s lead, making five for the plan and two against it. After trying for long to persuade Roberts to their way of thinking, McClashin and the other two agreed with bad grace to remain with the crowd. Mosquitoes made the night miserable, and the whole party were glad to get moving early next morning, and discover whether the buried stores were still in their cache. They found them untouched, although all round were trampled bushes and other evidence of the rigorous search made by the pilot-boat’s party. Each man set about making some kind of a knapsack in which to carry his portion of the load, and when this was done, the provisions, tools, two sails and some cordage were equally parcelled out among them. They re-buried a cask of water and a barrel of salted meat, with the intention of recovering them should they be successful in constructing a canoe at a reasonable distance.

It was noon before their preparations to continue the journey were completed, and after a meal they started off along the sandy shore. It was slow and fatiguing going for weak and emaciated men, and by sunset they had covered only six miles. They were somewhat encouraged when they halted for the night to see, a little inland, a hill on which, according to some of the men, cedars were growing. Perhaps, at the end of another day's toilsome trudging they would be able to begin their experiment at canoe-making.

A little before they had come to a halt Rashleigh had paused to rearrange his pack, so that the others had gone some distance ahead of him. As he was lifting his load on to his back, he fancied he saw a native black hiding in a bush near the beach. He looked more carefully and caught a glimpse of the black slinking away through the covert, as if unwilling to be seen.

He mentioned what he had seen to Roberts when he came up with the group, and the leader at once decided to take what precautions they could. He decided to change the arrangements for the night, selecting an open place, free from thicket or other cover, and built big fires. Successive watches by each of the men in turn were decided upon.

The evening hours passed without incident, but at dead of night the man on watch saw a number of dark forms wriggling across the sand surrounding the camp. At first he thought they were some kind of wild animals, but as they came within the glow of the fires, he saw that they were armed natives, who hoped to surprise the sleeping white men. The sentinel cautiously aroused the gang, and Roberts at once took charge. He whispered to the others to keep still, with their arms in readiness, until he gave the signal word, 'Now,' upon which they were to fire.

The savages crawled forward until they were – in their

own pidgin English – ‘murry close up,’ and then all lay motionless except their leader who writhed forward a few yards, partially raised himself, and uttered a guttural monosyllable. This was apparently an intimation that their foes were asleep, for the savages resumed their crawling advance until they reached the packs which the fugitives had thrown down in a circle around them. Then with a yell that seemed to split the night they leapt to their feet.

‘Now!’ barked Roberts.

The eight muskets flashed and roared, accompanied by a fighting cheer from the white men. Several of the blacks fell, and the remainder after an instant of paralysed surprise bounded off towards the forest with the speed of kangaroos. Hennessey, annoyed by the screams of the wounded, walked up to each in turn and battered in their skulls.

They had no more sleep that night, but sat watching the torches which the blacks now carried in the bush at a distance which betrayed their respect for the muskets. The moon rose, towards morning Roberts and another man scraped holes in the sand below high-water mark and buried the corpses of the fallen natives, fearing that the sight of them in the daylight would stir their tribesmen to seek a dreadful revenge. At dawn there was not a native in sight, and the band of runaways were able to enjoy their morning meal in peace. They immediately resumed their heavy march along the beach, coming, after about two miles, to a stretch which was overhung by cliffs. Rashleigh, realizing the danger of an ambush from overhead, suggested that one of the party should climb the nearest high rock to make sure whether the place was free of natives, having heard many tales of the cunning of the aborigines and appreciating the disadvantage the party would be under if an attack was launched from the cliffs.

His advice was overruled, the argument of the objectors being that it would be unwise for even one man to show himself conspicuously, as the enemy would almost certainly attack and kill him before his companions could get to the rescue. The march was therefore continued as near to the water's edge as possible, to keep out of range of ordinary native weapons. After walking half a mile they came to a small bay, strewn with large boulders, about a quarter of a mile across, beyond which the cliffs rose almost from the tide-mark. No sooner had the fugitives entered the bay – which was partially dry at low tide – when the silence was broken by the discordant battle-yells of the aborigines, a host of whom suddenly rose from behind rocks, flung their spears and instantly dropped back into cover. The unwounded white men at once turned to fly in their tracks, but found another detachment of the cunning blacks brandishing spears right across their line of retreat. They were trapped between two bands, each of which outnumbered them.

Roberts was lying with a spear through his leg, and Hanlon was down, struck by a waddie. The leader rose to his feet, broke off the protruding spear-point, and pluckily pulled the shaft out of his flesh.

'Don't be scared, my lads,' he cried defiantly, 'we'll beat those black vagabonds yet.'

Having launched their surprise attack, it seemed as if the blacks feared to show themselves as marks for the death-dealing muskets of the convicts. Roberts made for a flat-topped rock standing a few yards away and about eight feet high, and, clambering on to it, took a quick survey of the position. He took in the worst danger spots ahead, came down, and proposed to the others that they should fight their way through to a point where there was an overhanging ledge of rocks, beneath which they could be attacked only

from the front. There was no choice but to agree. Hanlon, assisted by one man, was set in the centre of the desperate bunch of men, four of them walking with their faces towards their goal, and three walking backwards as a rear-guard, all with their weapons at the ready.

They came suddenly to the edge of a steep rift worn by a narrow torrent in which about twenty blacks were concealed. The surprise was mutual, and as the white men paused the aborigines dashed up the declivity, only giving their enemies time for one hurried volley. Six blacks fell, but the remainder came unhesitatingly on and attacked hand to hand. The convicts gradually gained the ascendancy, their heavy clubbed muskets proving more effective weapons than the waddies of their opponents, who began to fall back with a view to reforming for a new assault. The whites took immediate advantage of the lull, reloaded their muskets and, with a single murderous volley, turned the cautious retreat into a panic rush for the cover of the nearest rocks, leaving thirteen dead or wounded. Of the convicts Shaw had been killed, and Hanlon had taken a severe wound on the head. The remainder had no alternative but to rush for the place of vantage which Roberts had selected, dragging Hanlon with them.

They had scarcely time to post themselves in positions to repel attacks, when the aborigines, screaming with fury and cries of vengeance, rushed upon them. The desperate men stood steady and with a carefully aimed volley brought down several of the attackers. There was an instant's pause, and then the remainder sprang forward, and in a few moments a wild hand-to-hand battle was in progress. The convict band set themselves back to the rock and crashed at the blacks with their clubbed guns.

Rashleigh found himself facing four stout blacks, and

hard put to it to keep them from killing him. He struck wildly at their legs and brought two of them down, and in lunging came a step forward from the rock. Instantly one of his assailants caught him round the body and made to carry him out of the mêlée, but, dropping his musket, Rashleigh took out and opened his pocket-knife and stabbed his captor repeatedly, until he released him and fell. The yells for help of the fallen man were unheeded in the noise of the fight and Rashleigh caught up his dropped musket and rained blows on the backs of a crowd of blacks who had got Roberts down. This unexpected attack from the rear caused the assailants to turn, giving Roberts the opportunity to rise and join Rashleigh in a final effort to repel their foes. Wearied by the fierce fight the aborigines gave way, and, seeing Rashleigh and Roberts reloading their death-dealing weapons, all of them who were still able turned and ran until they were out of sight. The convicts were at last in possession of their crude fortress, but they had gained it at the expense of three of their number killed outright, and all the others, except Rashleigh, wounded.

Twenty-two blacks, only a few of whom were killed, lay either unconscious or writhing with the pain of wounds on the ground adjacent to the overhanging rock. Hennessey, only slightly hurt, began at once to kill the wounded, and after a short period of natural revulsion Rashleigh and Roberts decided that it was the kindest solution of the gruesome problem to join him in putting the wounded out of their sufferings.

CHAPTER XXI

THE convicts had little cause for joy in their victory. Hanlon, Shaw and Perkins had been killed, Roberts was dangerously wounded, Owen severely, and the two Irishmen were slightly hurt. The blacks, though repulsed for a time, were certain to renew the attack at the first chance, and would continue to harass them until they had avenged their dead. Another serious consideration was the procuring of water, the spot where they were being dry; and Roberts's condition alone made it impossible for them to move, while the chance of being ambushed in such an attempt compelled them to stay where they were.

Rashleigh found himself blamed by McClashin and Hennessey as the prime cause of all the trouble and slaughter, because it had been on his advice that they had taken the route along the beach. They would hardly listen to his counter-assertions that they would have been equally open to attacks from the aborigines whichever direction they might have taken, and as he turned from them, realizing the hopelessness of talk, Hennessey raised his musket and took aim. Roberts, unable to intervene actively, owing to his wounds, shouted a warning. Rashleigh turned instantly and rushed at Hennessey, just as by good luck the musket misfired. He wrenched the gun from the Irishman's hands, and, lifting him bodily with the strength of anger, flung him to the ground. He stood over him, while Hennessey begged for mercy, and then with a contemptuous gesture turned away to minister to Roberts's wounds.

The leader seemed to be sinking fast from loss of blood, from four spear wounds, and the pain of the many contusions on his head and body. Rashleigh carefully pulled out the stumps of the spears which were still in the wounds, band-

aged them as well as he was able with the scanty material he had, and then carried Roberts to a nook where he could lie undisturbed.

His next concern was to reconnoitre their position, and to find water. He stole cautiously from the little fastness, carrying his loaded musket, but he saw no sign of the aborigines, nor for some time did he find any trace of water. At last, however, in a cleft at the foot of the cliff, he came upon an aquatic-looking plant, around which the soil was moist. He scraped out a hole with a stick and noticed that it began to fill with liquid, which proved to be pure water. He managed to get a small supply into a quart pot which he had brought with him and, having first greatly enlarged the hole, hurried back to Roberts with the water. The leader drank it gratefully, and the other men clamoured for a drink, taking with an ill-grace Rashleigh's explanation that it must be some little time before enough water for them all could percolate into his primitive well. He then set about removing the corpses that still lay upon the floor of their retreat, dragging them to a hole in the rocks and covering them with sand.

He next proceeded to make the place as secure as possible, driving stakes into fissures in the rocks, and interlacing the ropes which they had brought from the boat, until he had made a rough *chevaux-de-frise* or hedge, with thorny boughs fastened in amongst the strands of rope. This would, he thought, serve as some sort of protection from a sudden attack and keep the blacks off long enough, at any rate, to give the fugitives time to reload their muskets. This task finished, he went off and fetched in a supply of drinking-water, and prepared some food, which neither Roberts nor Owen, however, was able to eat. McClashin and Hennessey very readily shared the meal, and made an obvious pretence

THE MEMOIRS OF

of renewed friendliness, but Rashleigh noticed meaning and sinister glances passing between the two ruffians, and determined to be on his guard. Consequently, after they had finished eating and he had attended to the comfort of the wounded men, he went in search of some safe place in which he could sleep alone.

He came upon a fissure in a rock at some distance from their retreat, which was filled with seaweed thrown there by past storms, the upper layers of which were dry. Here he decided to spend the night, but, before turning in, he took the precaution of giving one more look to the wounded men and smoke a pipe with Roberts. He gathered up a great armful of dried seaweed for making easier the leader's couch and went back to the fastness. As he approached, he heard voices talking in low furtive tones, and recognizing them as McClashin's and Hennessey's, he quietly dropped the seaweed, and crept forward until he was behind the rock in front of which they were seated.

'I tell you he's as strong as a bullock,' he heard Hennessey saying, 'and might be more than a match for the pair of us.'

He heard McClashin answer: 'Well, then, we must do the other thing, that's all.'

On which the two men rose and moved into the open cavern where the wounded men were lying.

Puzzled as to the meaning of what he had overheard, Rashleigh retrieved his seaweed, convinced that the two blackguards meant ill to himself. He entered the cavern warily, but found the Irishmen sitting, chatting unconcernedly, by the fire.

'I see you've something to make a bed,' said McClashin, indicating the seaweed. 'Is there any more of it anywhere handy?'

'Plenty – on the beach,' answered Rashleigh shortly.

'Then we'll go and gather some,' said Hennessey; and the two left the cavern together.

As soon as they were well away, Rashleigh removed the flints from their muskets, and concealed all the other fire-arms except his own. He then made up a bed of seaweed for Roberts and Owen, filled and lit his pipe, and lay down beside his wounded companions, who soon fell asleep.

McClashin and Hennessey returned, each with a load of seaweed.

'Now, wid this, it's a good night we'll be passing,' said McClashin; and, as Rashleigh made no reply, he went on in a would-be friendly way: 'What's the reason you won't speak to a body? Surely you ain't crabbed at us still, because you had a few words wid us to-day, are you? You musn't mind me or Hennessey at all, at all; for we are only a couple of foolish, wild Irishmen.'

Hennessey laughed and swore: 'By Jabers thin, I'm foolish enough, anyway, for I'd quarrel wid my best friend sometimes, but it's all over wid me in a minnit, and so it is.'

Rashleigh doubted the sincerity of both of them, but suppressed his impulse to tell them this, remarking instead that he was not angry, but only tired and very sleepy.

'Faix thin, and no wonder,' said McClashin, 'after the hullabaloo we've all bin in this day. By my soul! I saw you stick that big black divil that was for hauling you off like a horse's head to a bonfire. Sure, that was nately done; and thin how you rattled the others about the skulls that were for killing poor Roberts. I will say, if you hadn't come back to help us, it's dead we should all have bin; and God knows the whole of us may be yet.'

Rashleigh sensed the treachery behind the whining praises of McClashin, and decided to keep his wits sharpened and his senses alert ready for whatever deed of stealthy violence

he two Irishmen meditated. Despite all his determination, he found himself beginning to doze, so he rose and stole silently out of the cavern unobserved in the darkness by the other two, who, he guessed, must have fallen asleep. He reached his lair, lay down comfortably amongst the seaweed and slept deeply until morning. At daylight he cautiously returned to the cavern and found all his companions still sleeping and his rough defences undisturbed. He at once set about the preparation of breakfast, and McClashin, awaking, offered to help him. At the sound of voices Hennessey also got up and gave Rashleigh a greeting in a hesitating, furtive manner which contrasted strongly with his assumed heartiness of last night.

‘And how did you sleep?’ McClashin asked Rashleigh as they were eating.

‘Well enough,’ Rashleigh answered, refusing to be drawn.

‘And I did so too,’ said the Irishman, ‘only the moskeeters were troublesome.’

This was the only indication the two ruffians gave that they were puzzled, and the rest of the day passed quietly, without any sign of a renewal of the attack by the blacks. Towards nightfall, leaving Hennessey on guard against the blacks, McClashin and Rashleigh went out to fish, returning to the cavern as soon as they had caught enough for two good meals. The two sick men ate a little of the broiled fish and, after doing what he could to ease their wounds by rebinding and cleaning, Rashleigh lay down to smoke his pipe beside Roberts as on the previous night. Again he stole out to his secret sleeping-place, but it was some hours before he finally fell into a dream-troubled slumber. He dreamed first that he was at home as a boy playing with his only sister when, a childish quarrel occurring, she was suddenly changed into a hideous creature with demoniac features which slightly

RALPH RASHLEIGH

resembled those of Foxley, the dead bushranger, who, grinning horribly, made as if to strangle the lonely sleeper. Next he dreamt that he was at Marshall's cottage paying successful court to Jane Bates, when the door was flung open and McClashin, accompanied by Hennessey, rushed in and shot the girl dead, and were dragging him out when he awoke oppressed by an indefinable sense of dread. Try as he would to fall asleep again, he could not.

Fear of some calamity impending dominated his consciousness, until at last it drove him from his lair towards the cavern to see if anything were amiss there. As he came in sight of the opening, he was surprised to see the glow of a fire, which lit up the surrounding rocks for yards around. His first thought was that the blacks had surprised his sleeping companions, and, having set fire to his improvised hedge, were lying in wait for the fugitives to emerge confused with sleep, to spear them before they were properly awake.

He cocked his piece and crept stealthily forward and saw McClashin stooping down to add fuel to the fire, while Hennessey was looking puzzled as he bent over the spot where Rashleigh had first lain down. A shiver ran down his spine as he realized the significance of their actions.

'That beggar Rashleigh isn't anywhere in the damned place,' he heard Hennessey say in a tone of baffled rage.

'Well, never mind him now,' answered McClashin, 'we can do him in when he does come. Let's settle the other two.'

Rashleigh stole quickly forward until he was quite close to Hennessey, who was now bending over Owen. There was a muffled shriek and the gleam of a blood-stained knife in Hennessey's hand, and, before Rashleigh could act, the murder had been done. The Irishman rose and turned to find the muzzle of Rashleigh's musket within a yard of his head. His howl of terror was drowned by the noise of the

report, and next instant the brains of the cold-blooded murderer were spattering in his accomplice's face. McClashin, who had not seen Rashleigh until that moment, was too surprised to offer effectual opposition, and the rescuer sent him crashing to earth with a terrific blow from the butt-end of his gun. Rashleigh, appalled by the suddenness of the tragedy, watched the brief quivering of the fallen man's limbs, until they became still, and then felt violently sick. There he was alone, with three – possibly four – corpses around him, two of them dead by his own hand; and, beyond the dim light of the fire, the menace of countless hostile blacks.

For some moments he stood retching, but, realizing the need of immediate self-control, he pulled himself together and made up the fire. By its light he was overjoyed to find that Roberts had not been attacked, and was still alive. As he was about to speak to the horrified leader, he heard McClashin calling in a weak voice. He turned in amazement, as he believed the Irishman to be dead. He went over and bent down to hear what the man had to say, seeing as he did so the terrible nature of the wound he had inflicted. In low tones McClashin, penitent in the face of death, told Rashleigh how he and Hennessey had purposed to kill all three of their surviving companions, and cut off their heads and those of the three they had buried. They then intended, he said in a whisper, to take the heads back to Newcastle and give themselves up to the commandant, to whom their tale was to be that they had been forced against their wills by the dead men to join in the seizure of the boat, and that, taking advantage of an opportunity to seize the firearms, they had killed them out of hand. Thus they had hoped to gain their freedom, knowing that this had been the reward of many others for similar deeds.

McClashin died before dawn.

Rashleigh and Roberts remained unmolested in their retreat for several days, until the leader of the diminished gang had sufficiently recovered his strength to be able to walk. Although still very weak he yielded to Rashleigh's entreaties to leave the place, the very air of which seemed to him to be polluted with the poison of sudden slaughter and murderous violence.

Burying most of the tools, arms and other stores in the sand, they set out again upon their toilsome and dangerous march, taking with them two muskets, ammunition, an axe, a cross-cut saw, and a small supply of provisions. Their intention still was to reach the distant cedars and try to construct a canoe, but Roberts being so feeble, it was three days before they had covered the twenty miles which brought them near the trees.

They found that the cedars were growing upon an island in a narrow bay which formed the estuary of a very rapid river, and they were considerably exercised in mind as to how they were to negotiate the crossing of the stream. Rashleigh at length recalled Foxley's device for crossing the Nepean River. They therefore went for some distance upstream above the island and constructed a rough catamaran near a bend in the river. It was made of logs lashed together with wild vines, and, after testing its strength, the two men dragged it to the water and boarded it, Rashleigh arming himself with a guide pole. Fortunately for them the stream was shallow as well as swift, and Rashleigh was able to head the crude craft in the right direction by using his pole as on a punt, and in a few minutes they had landed safely on the island.

Dense brushwood grew right down to the water's edge, and the cedars grew on the hilly centre of the small island.

THE MEMOIRS OF

They saw, with misgiving, that the trees were of immense girth, and Rashleigh, with his timber-felling experience to guide him, doubted whether their saw was long enough to be of any real service in cutting down even the smallest of them. In any case, it would be some time before Roberts would have regained sufficient strength for such heavy labour, and it looked as though Rashleigh would have to resort to the lengthy and tedious process of chopping a tree through with the axe.

The delicate state of Roberts's health, however, made the first consideration the erection of a shelter against the weather. Rashleigh, eager for any occupation which would keep at bay the unpleasant thoughts connected with the recent tragedies, set to work, and in three days had built a fine hut, with wattle walls and a roof thatched with reeds.

He now decided to leave Roberts in this shelter, which he returned to their little fastness to recover the buried tools which he would need for the construction of a canoe, and also as much of the cordage as he could carry. He crossed the stream one morning, leaving Roberts with strict injunctions to remain in the hut and so avoid any chance of being seen by wandering natives.

As he was carrying nothing but his gun, Rashleigh was able to make such good speed that he reached the vicinity of his destination before the day was nearly done. He met no one on his route, but, on nearing the scene of tragedy, he saw a dense column of smoke ascending from a spot which seemed to him to be the exact location of their late retreat. He climbed a tree which grew upon rising ground, and saw a number of blacks on the beach in front of the cavern, obviously intent upon the solemnities of religious or, probably, funeral rites. He had heard that the aborigines have a horror of remaining long near a place where any of

their fellows have met with violent death, so he decided to wait patiently until they withdrew. Hour after hour went by, occupied by a succession of ceremonies and dances, and it was almost sundown before the blacks at last withdrew and Rashleigh felt it was safe to go forward.

He shuddered at the evidences of the revolting rites which had been performed. The killed blacks had all been exhumed and reburied sitting or standing, in accordance with tribal custom, in a circle of pits dug above high-tide mark, and in the centre of this primitive graveyard posts had been set up on which the heads of the dead white men were hung by the jaws, from which all the teeth had been extracted and carried off. In the orgy of vengeance the bodies of the dead convicts had been dismembered, and portions of the remains placed upon each of the graves, and the unwanted parts flung heedlessly about the beach.

Rashleigh, recovering from the first wave of horror which swept through him at the sight, determined that when the blacks revisited this charnel-place they should see no remains of his late companions over which to gloat. Foul and repugnant as the task was, he gathered all the mangled remains, piled them all together upon a huge pile of brushwood and set fire to the ghastly pyre, knowing that superstition would keep him immune from molestation by the aborigines, who would sooner die than revisit that place after nightfall.

He found the tools and other equipment where they had been hidden, and taking as much as he could carry, set out to reach the island before daybreak. It was, however, long after sunrise that he arrived to find Roberts still improving, but considerably alarmed at his long absence.

They waited until Roberts was sufficiently strong to share in the work, and then selecting a stout cedar, which was not,

THE MEMOIRS OF

after all, too thick for the use of the saw, they had it felled, the trunk severed to the length of a canoe, and the bark stripped in the course of a single day's work. They split the log in two by means of wedges and then began the process of hollowing the two pieces by means of burning. They then shaped the prows and sterns of the two rough canoes, but it was weeks before the work was finally completed and the lashed canoes were safely launched upon the water. This heavy task done, by working unremittingly every hour of daylight, they then set about preparing their cordage, sails and oars.

Rashleigh noticed that the river had been falling lower during the period of their stay on the island, but Roberts took small account of this, remarking that so long as there was depth enough for them to go over the falls, over which the river debouched into the sea, there would be plenty of water in the ocean. The weather had become oppressive, and the sun was obscured by a faint yellow haze, and a weighty stillness seemed to lie upon the land. One morning, while the two men were busily at work upon the canoe, Rashleigh felt the little craft tremble, seemingly caused by a shuddering of the land against which it rested. Then came a moaning, rushing noise which seemed to rise from the neighbouring mountains. Rashleigh paled, unaccountably frightened.

'What's that dreadful noise, Roberts?' he asked, nervously.

'Only distant thunder,' answered Roberts easily.

'Thunder!' exclaimed Rashleigh, looking at the sky 'Thunder in a sky without a cloud. Good God, look!'

Panic-stricken, he pointed wildly to the bend of the river where, the awful moaning growing louder, a great bank of rushing water seeming of fabulous height came advancing with a rush towards the island. Roberts had scarcely time

RALPH RASHLEIGH

to raise his head to look at what Rashleigh pointed to, when men and canoes were engulfed and carried away in the sweeping, thundering flood. The cracking noise of the smashed canoes was the last thing Rashleigh remembered before losing consciousness.

CHAPTER XXII

RASHLEIGH returned to consciousness upon an arid beach on which he was lying surrounded by a horde of aborigines. Immediately his eyes opened, a quarrel arose among the blacks, who had been busily employed in resuscitating him, the reason for which seemed to be a competition as to who should have the privilege of dragging him off. The quarrel seemed to be on the point of developing into an armed combat, when the sudden appearance of a single native caused all the contestants to fall quiet.

The aborigine whose arrival had had so dramatic an effect was one of the most terrible-looking human beings that Rashleigh had ever dreamed of seeing. His polished skull was bald except for a narrow circle of sparse white hairs around the top, and his beard was luxuriant and long; one of his eyes was gone and the socket showed raw and bloody, and the other seemed to be filmed over, and the whole surface of his face was scarred. His body was incredibly emaciated, and was also covered with terrible scars, and, even among a tribe renowned for uncleanness, he was the filthiest specimen of them all. At his approach the others withdrew to a short distance from Rashleigh, who had been expecting every instant to be killed by one or other of the clubs which the quarrelling blacks had been swinging as if to give emphasis to their unintelligible arguments.

As the ugly old man reached Rashleigh's side, absolute silence fell upon the horde, several of whom held their clubs still, brandished in the posture in which his coming had found them. Every one's gaze was fixed upon the decrepit savage. From these signs of respect and fear, Rashleigh guessed that he was one of those strange creatures, called carandjies, of whom he had heard descriptions since his

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

arrival in Australia. These men possessed singular power and influence over even the most untamed tribes, combining in their persons the character of doctor, priest and magician; and everything seemed to confirm the prisoner's guess that this strangely scarred savage was the local carandjie, and one of great eminence among his kind.

The ancient supported his tottering, enfeebled body with a limb of a tree carried as a staff in one hand, and in the other he carried a green eucalyptus bough. At a motion of his hand the blacks fell farther back and crouched together in a circle, while the carandjie tottered several times round Rashleigh, waving the eucalyptus, and chanting a dull, monotonous song which seemed to be a repetition of two or three words only. At length he ceased his chant, and sat down at the head of his captive, who was watching his every motion with apprehension. The old man made some kind of a speech to which the now pacific audience listened with marked attention, acknowledging its end with a chorus of guttural grunts. His speech finished, the carandjie rose and took three more chanting turns round Rashleigh.

Two athletic tribesmen now came forward and helped him to his feet, indicating to him by signs that he was to walk with them. Resistance being out of the question, he did as he was bidden and, supported by his two guides, reached the camp of the tribe, which was in a clearing in the forest-land. It consisted simply of a number of small fires, beside each of which reposed the djins (wives) and dogs of the warriors, guarding the dilleys (nets) which held the fishing tackle and such weapons as the men were not carrying with them. Rashleigh's guides, under the direction of the carandjie, led him to a resting-place near the old man's three fires to which, according to custom, he was entitled, along with the three djins, each of whom attended her separate fire. However

many wives an aborigine may possess, each of them has to maintain her fire and provide a portion of the food for her lord, it being the custom for the men to send their wives at dawn each day upon a foraging expedition, themselves sleeping or lounging until the return of their djins, whom they reward with caresses or blows according to the quantity of food brought in. At that time the aboriginal women were treated as slaves by the men, who confined their energies to hunting kangaroo and opossum, when they were not fighting.

Rashleigh was placed on the ground, and one of the carandjie's djins supplied his guards with a quantity of cordage, which he surmised had been made of yarn spun from the filaments of bark. His arms were bound fast to his sides and his feet were tied together in such a manner that he was unable to move, after which the guards withdrew, leaving him with the ancient and his attendant djin. The old man again sat very close to his head and started chattering at a great pace in a spate of words, not one of which his listener understood.

Another djin came up bearing on a few fresh fern leaves an apparently newly roasted fish. After a few words with her husband, she raised Rashleigh to a sitting position, tore the fish to pieces with her fingers and began to feed him with morsels, which he enjoyed, despite the insipidity of their taste. The djin then held a calabash of water to his lips, and the strangely served meal ended. She then laid him again upon his back, covered him with a cloak of opossum skins, and told him, by use of signs, that he was expected to go to sleep; and despite his anxiety, he was soon in a deep slumber.

He awoke in darkness to the monotonous noise of croaking frogs, and was unable to sleep again owing to the dull

pains in his bound limbs. Before dawn, the djins departed on their hunt for food for their men, and a black came up to Rashleigh and loosened his bonds, motioning him to rise. He did as he was ordered, and saw that all the males of the tribe were assembled, fully armed, their faces and bodies fearfully smeared with yellow, white and red earths.

A procession was formed, headed by the old carandjie, supported by two strong tribesmen. A dozen warriors followed waving green boughs to and fro, chanting an incantation in low tones. Rashleigh came next between two guards armed with spear, shield and waddie, and wearing their hair decorated fancifully with red and blue feathers among tufts of cotton grass. Bones were worn in their earlobes and in the cartilage of their noses. They were followed by another detachment carrying boughs, and the rear was brought up by the body of about one hundred and fifty fully-armed warriors.

The quaint procession went slowly forward until it reached an open green space which overlooked the sea. Rashleigh noticed that the sky was beginning to glow in the east, heralding the rising of the sun. A mound stood in the centre of the space in which they had halted, and on this he was placed in a sitting posture, facing the sea, while the warriors took up positions behind him and at his sides. The blacks who had carried boughs now stuck them in their girdles behind them, with the leaves downwards, so that they looked like tails, and began to execute a weird dance the motions of which seemed to the watcher to derive from the action of the kangaroo.

The carandjie meanwhile approached the prisoner and placed before him a bundle made of opossum skins. Then he took a bough and waved it in a peculiar way above the bundle to the accompaniment of a muttered chant. This

preliminary rite completed, he at length opened the mysterious bundle, which Rashleigh saw contained a number of single human teeth, an instrument made of green talc resembling a chisel, and a flat, irregularly-shaped stone.

At a gesture from the ancient, two warriors seized Rashleigh's arms, and the carandjie's expression became so demoniacal that he was sure his end was imminent. The man's actions, however, made it clear that death was not to be immediate. The magician took up the chisel and the stone instrument and, speaking with patent earnestness, approached Rashleigh, making signs as if he wished him to open his mouth. He did as he appeared to be bidden, and the old man placed the chisel edge against one of his front teeth, looking out across the ocean as he did so. At that instant the rim of the sun appeared above the horizon and, as if that were a sign, the carandjie struck the chisel sharply with the stone, forcing out the tooth.

The whole company broke into a loud shout at this, and the tooth was handed round from hand to hand for inspection, each man making a motion as if to spit upon it. It was then restored to the carandjie, who solemnly placed it in the bundle with the other teeth, and tied it up with a great show of ceremony. A dance by the unarmed men, known as a corroborree by colonists, followed, the warriors accompanying the dancers with shouts and clashing of weapons; and as the dance ended Rashleigh was seized and laid face downwards upon the ground, held there as it seemed to him by half the tribe. He had scarcely time to wonder what the next strange happening would be, when he felt several gashes inflicted on the flesh of his back, and resigned himself with composure to his now certain fate. Being indurated to torture of this kind by the hundreds of lashes he had endured

on Emu Plains and Coal River, he gave no outward sign of the pain the gashes caused.

He was quickly turned over to lie on his bleeding back, and saw that each of the dancers carried a small sharp shell crimsoned with his blood. These tormentors, glaring furiously at him, stooped down and gashed the front of his body, while a great yell went up from the assembly. He was instantly raised from his recumbent position, and saw that he had two rows of nine gashes between the shoulders and the bottom ribs, and guessed that the same number had been made upon his back. Blood was flowing from the wounds, and he could feel it trickling warmly down his body and legs. After another dance, the carandjie came up to him with a shell full of some sticky preparation with which he carefully anointed all the wounds, which almost at once stopped bleeding. Rashleigh was then placed on a litter made of boughs, hoisted upon the shoulders of four tribesmen, and the procession returned to camp in much the same order as they had left it, except that they went with a great shouting and beating of waddies against their shields, and parties breaking into dances, wild as a horde of furies.

At the camp the djins were all assembled roasting fish, roots and grubs and excitedly making preparations for a great feast. Two of them were busily pounding some condiment between stones, transferring the mash to a calabash. The men squatted in a wide circle, Rashleigh being placed next to the carandjie, and immediately the women served out broiled roots and fish, and by way of a delicacy some of those great grubs found in rotten timber, well roasted. The ancient ate very little himself, but continually passed over his share to Rashleigh, who now began to feel more hopeful about his future. In spite of his desire to create a good impression, he found himself unable to eat anything but the

fish, and even this, eaten without salt, he found rather insipid in taste.

At intervals the djins handed round calabashes filled with a hot, moderately sweet drink, but they were not allowed to sit or join in the revelry; and as soon as the feast was finished the women withdrew; nor did Rashleigh see a single djin during the rest of the day.

After the women had departed, the calabash containing the roots which the two djins had been pounding was handed to the carandjie, who divided up the contents into a great many portions, which were put into smaller calabashes. These were then filled with water and the mixture heated by means of red-hot stones placed in the vessels. The hot liquor was then drunk from shells dipped into the calabashes, and when Rashleigh tasted some it reminded him of fermented Spanish liquorice, except there was a pungent acidity which clung to the palate after the liquor had been swallowed. Practically the whole tribe became speedily intoxicated, dancing, shouting, fighting, and singing for several hours, until when at last Rashleigh was able to wrap himself in an opossum rug and lie down to sleep the whole assembly of savages were strewn about, dead drunk.

The next day Rashleigh, despite the fact that he had been abstemious, suffered all the after-effects of a heavy night's debauch, but his case was enviable compared with that of the majority of blacks, who looked literally half dead from the potent liquor. The old carandjie seemed to suffer more than any, lying in a torpor with his head pillowed in the lap of his favourite djin, who served him at intervals throughout the day with cooling drink.

A few days after the feasting Rashleigh's wounds began to cicatrize, and over each gash a wavy scar as thick as his middle finger had formed. The old wizard now gave him a

quantity of dark coloured pigment, telling him by signs to anoint his skin with it. He did as he was ordered, repeating the operation daily for about a fortnight, at the end of which his whole body, with the exception of the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, was stained a dull dark hue. The chief now gave him what appeared to be a ball of suet to rub over his skin, which deepened and fixed the colour, and in the end Rashleigh might easily have passed as a native.

The carandjie's next move for the comfort of the adopted stranger was to present him with a djin, as well as a quantity of native weapons, the two men always eating together and sleeping a few yards apart. He commanded one of the black warriors to instruct Rashleigh in the mysteries of savage life, and in this way he learnt the various methods of hunting food and spearing fish. He was well content to fall in with the destiny which fate had so strangely put upon him, convinced as he was that it was safer and better than what awaited him if he returned to live among white men. He, therefore, applied himself with eager goodwill to mastering everything that his black preceptor had to teach him, and soon became as efficient and dexterous as anyone who was not a native could hope to be.

During the four years which he spent in this state of contented barbarism his life was steady and uneventful. In the mornings his djin, named Lorra, went out to fish and dig roots like any other black's wife, whilst he went off to hunt for bandicoots, or kangaroo rats. His hunting was varied if he chanced to meet with a guana or an opossum, which he pursued in native fashion, cutting notches in the trunk of the tree which he climbed until the creature was perched on a slender bough incapable of taking the weight of a man. He would then cut the small branch through with his stone axe so that the quarry fell to earth, where it remained either

THE MEMOIRS OF

killed or too maimed to move until he slithered down and captured it, taking it back to camp as a dish for breakfast.

Often his pack of half-wild dogs accompanied him, chasing bandicoot or kangaroo rat until it took refuge in some hollow log, when, instead of cutting it out, Rashleigh would plug up one end of the hollow with clay, and set fire to the other end, causing the animal to choose between being suffocated or running the gauntlet of the dogs which he never knew to fail to make a kill. He had mastered woodcraft and, however far through the dense bush his hunting might take him, he had all the native's gift for finding his way unerringly back to camp. By the time he returned Lorra would have ready the cleaned roots, boiled or roasted, and the carandjie's other djins would have prepared fish, and to these would be added whatever Rashleigh had brought back from the morning's hunt. He had taught the djins something of the white man's arts of cleanliness and preparation of food, and he would sit down with the carandjie and the hens to better cooked food than was usual to aborigines. The rest of the day, until the evening, was spent in lazing in the shade, until hunger brought him and his protector to the second and last meal of the day, punctually prepared by the women.

There were night fishing expeditions made to secluded bays and inlets at which, accompanied by djins bearing torches of resinous bark, Rashleigh and the other men armed with spears would wade into the water up to their waists, while the fish, attracted by the glare of the torches, swarmed round them. It was an easy matter to spear them in the shallows; and the djins returned to camp heavily laden with the catch.

At least once every winter, when the stripping of the undergrowth of foliage made the bush penetrable, a great

hunt was organized. All the camp dogs were got together and leashed, and a circle of several miles was selected for beating. The blacks advanced with yells and a great beating of instruments, blowing on conch shells, and with every noise that could contribute to the general pandemonium. The wild animals retreated as the noise came near them, and when nightfall came, the tribe encamped and slept with a strong guard to drive back any beasts that might try to escape. At daybreak the blacks resumed their converging advance until the time came when the circle had diminished in size until not more than six yards separated the men. Then the more expert hunters, unleashing all the dogs, beat forward into the thicket in which the animals were imprisoned, forcing them to fly from their covert in a panic, to be slaughtered by the spears and waddies of the waiting hunters. The game was carried back to camp, and at night a great feast was held with the vast quantities of food. Liquor made from roots and a kind of mead, prepared from honey, was consumed in unlimited quantity, and the feast usually ended in wild drunken quarrels, as apt as not to end fatally in some instances, and the gradual subsiding of the whole tribe into the deep sleep of intoxication.

Rashleigh soon acquired a competent knowledge of the simple language of the aborigines, the vocabulary of which was limited to the few words which were necessary to make intelligible the simplest ideas. He discovered that they had no form of religion, but were ridden by superstitions of the supernatural, chiefly concerned with the ghosts of slain warriors transformed into malignant demons whose hobby was to kill women and children, and any warriors whom they came upon defenceless or asleep. Many spots were under a taboo of terror from this cause, the blacks believing them to be the haunts of goblins who had been seen in

THE MEMOIRS OF

demoniacally terrifying shapes by various unlucky and imaginative natives. There was one superstition the foundation of which he never learnt. Once the natives had lain down for the night nothing would induce them to leave their fires, even if they were dying down, and they would never build a fire with large logs which could be depended upon to last through the night. Never in all his stay with them did he see faggots used which were thicker than a man's wrist, which was the ultimate measure used for determining the sticks to be used for fuel.

Such government as the natives had was a kind of patriarchal despotism, all the power being vested in the old carandjie. He had won his position, so far as Rashleigh was able to discover, by the great feats of war which he had performed in his younger days, and he maintained it in his decrepitude by imposing upon his ignorant subjects by dexterity as a conjurer. One of the instances which Rashleigh witnessed of the old man's use of his power concerned his own djin.

Lorra, who had been the old carandjie's favourite before she was given to Rashleigh, complained one day to the old man that Jumba, a powerful black, had beaten her because she had quarrelled with one of his wives while they were digging roots. The old magician worked himself up to a high pitch of fury as he listened to her tale, and ordered Jumba to be brought before him. The warrior listened humbly to the storm of virulent abuse which the angry carandjie poured out at him, and attempted to justify his conduct by throwing the whole blame upon Lorra, maintaining that she had irritated him past endurance by her scolding tongue. This defence was listened to coldly by the old man, who simply addressed three words to Jumba:

'Begone, and wither.'

Rashleigh, not understanding the sentence, asked Lorra what was meant, and learnt from her that it meant literally that the delinquent had been condemned to pine away and die. She told him of several cases of men actually wasting away and dying under this sentence: saying that the only ones who recovered after its pronouncement were those whom the carandjie had forgiven. At first Rashleigh attributed this to mere credulity on the part of the girl, but later he saw that there was truth in what she had told him. The old magician was medicine man to the tribe, with a wide knowledge of herbs and drugs, and his method was to administer harmful stuff with his victim's food or in potions which he gave him to drink, which, if not actually killing him, induced painful and lingering sickness. The belief in the efficacy of the sentence held by the natives was evidenced in this case by Jumba, who, on hearing sentence pronounced, broke out into noisy lamentations, tore the fastenings and feathers from his hair, and cut severe gashes all over his body: he and his two djins crying wildly to the carandjie for mercy. In despair, Jumba and his women withdrew, and for a week, during which they were shunned by the whole tribe as completely as if they had been placed in quarantine, the man lay in a state of dispirited dejection, deaf to the consolations of his djins, believing utterly that his doom was inevitable unless the ban were lifted. Lorra herself continually petitioned the old man to forgive Jumba, and at last he yielded to her importunity of mercy, and signified the lifting of the sentence by sending to Jumba the hindquarter of a fine kangaroo.

Graver offences such as murder, or the theft of a djin within the tribe, were punished by a verdict of a general council of all the warriors belonging to the sept of the tribe, who, according to the gravity of the case, sentenced the

THE MEMOIRS OF

offender to have a certain number of spears thrown at him. On the day fixed for the carrying out of the sentence, all the warriors were assembled just before sunrise at the place where Rashleigh had been put through his ceremony of initiation. The accused black, naked and unarmed, but carrying a shield, was placed upon the mound and the nearest relative of the murdered man or the aggrieved person stood at seventy paces from the prisoner. Immediately the sun's rim appeared above the horizon, the first spear was thrown, followed by two or three more, according to the number specified in the sentence. The culprit defended himself as best he could with his shield. Every warrior assembled then, in turn, discharged the same number of spears, which completed the sentence. Whether the man died or survived, it was forbidden ever again to speak of his offence. Rashleigh was astonished at the dexterity with which these natives defended themselves with the shield, which varied from eight inches to a foot in width. In several instances he had seen criminals ward off a succession of as many as three hundred spears, and escape with only four or five leg wounds.

As sentence for crimes of unusual atrocity it was ordered that twenty-one warriors should simultaneously throw a spear at the culprit, which was equivalent to being condemned to death. The aborigines were adepts at spear-throwing, the majority being able to strike a small bird at a hundred paces, and with force enough to penetrate as much as four inches into the trunk of a tree. There was consequently no hope for the most expert shieldsman to meet or turn a flight of spears flung by a picked band of warriors. Rashleigh saw no man condemned to this punishment escape with his life.

The aborigines, he found, mated without any kind of

marriage ceremony. As soon as a youth had undergone his initiation by gashes and was declared a grown man, his first use of his weapons was to hunt for a wife. He would steal unseen towards some swamp near which another tribe was located, and lie there all night, waiting until at dawn the young djins came to search for food. His attention would be riveted upon the girls whose head-dress showed them to be unmarried, and, selecting one whose capture opportunity made easy, he would pounce upon her and bear her struggling and screaming away. If he succeeded in carrying her to the camp before any of her male relatives could rescue her, she became his bride by capture, and was never more owned by her tribe nor allowed to enter its camp again.

It was a point of honour or habit among the girls always to resist capture to the uttermost of their strength, biting, kicking and scratching their captors; and it was similarly habitual for the man to beat the struggler about the head, body and limbs with blows that were calculated surely to break her gallant resistance. Often Rashleigh saw the couples arrive, the girl hanging insensible over the man's back, and he with blood streaming from the rents made by her teeth and nails. It was a rough fashion in courtship to which the only exceptions were cases such as the old carandjie, who, being too feeble to man his own djin, was obliged to depute a younger man to carry out the rigorous abduction. There was always competition for this position of deputy, as virtue was supposed to derive from undertaking the task for persons of supposed supernatural power.

The death of a warrior, especially of one in his youth or prime, was regarded as a calamity by the whole tribe, whose custom was to cut great gashes in their flesh as evidence of the grief which they expressed with loud and continuous wailing. The death of a chief or of a carandjie was attended

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

by many superstitious ceremonies and observances, while the death of women, children, and uninitiated youths was completely disregarded. The name of the dead was never again mentioned after burial, the form of which was a sitting posture for warriors, standing erect for great chiefs; and women and children were buried lying face downwards. Oval-shaped mounds, sometimes planted with aromatic shrubs, marked the graves.

CHAPTER XXIII

RASHLEIGH had been too long inured to hardship to suffer any ill-effects from the savage conditions in which he was forced to live, which were in any case free from the brutal punishment which had been his intermittent lot since he had reached the colony. To return to the white population meant almost certain death, and he grew firmer in his resolution to remain with the blacks and to end his days with them.

At the end of about four and a half years, however, an event occurred which had unexpected consequences. His foster-father, the old carandjie, died. He had for long been growing steadily more decrepit, and at last sank into a state of torpor which was only distinguishable from death by his slow and hardly discernible breathing. During this last illness the entire tribe were ceaseless in their attentions, and when at last death came to prove their efforts unavailing, the warriors and djins broke into peals of lamentations so loud and discordant that Rashleigh was appalled. The wailing which ensued upon the pronouncement that the carandjie was dead was still in progress when a powerful black, ambitious to succeed to the carandjieship, flung himself full length upon the corpse, applied his lips to those of the dead and inhaled deeply for some moments. As the man rose, one of the djins, with a great show of stealth, cut an incision with a sharp stone in the dead man's back, and dragging out the kidneys, threw them on to the breast of the corpse; and then ran off. Several djins, uttering loud lamentations and ceremonial reproaches, pursued her for some distance, after which they all returned, the apparently offending djin escaping further molestation.

The carandjie-elect had at once pounced upon the

THE MEMOIRS OF

kidneys, which he gruesomely stripped of the shrivelled yellow fat, and then replaced in the corpse, the incision being sewn up by Lorra with kangaroo sinew threaded through a bone needle. The body was next anointed with the gum which was normally used in place of pitch upon the canoes and weapons, and the head was decorated by vari-coloured feathers, which were stuck to the bald skull with the same material. The corpse was then wrapped in a new opossum-skin rug, the fur turned inwards, and the exposed surface fancifully daubed with crude designs in coloured earths. A rough structure was then erected, made like a table of green boughs, upon which the corpse was laid. A number of small fires were then lit at a short distance along each side, and four unarmed warriors began to walk sombrely round the corpse, waving green boughs over it, at times making feinting rushes as if to drive away some invisible being, chanting the whole time a monotonous dirge. This mourning ceremony continued throughout the day and night until the funeral, which, like all their important occasions, was fixed to take place at sunrise.

A party of warriors, using the djins' wooden paddles, were detailed to dig the grave. None slept during the night, which was filled continually with renewed lamentations and funeral dances; and the fires were kept brightly burning. As the grey light of dawn appeared the grave-diggers came to announce that all was ready, and the entire tribe assembled for the obsequies of their carandjie. The men were unarmed, their bodies smeared horribly with coloured earths, white and red predominating, and each man carried a shell in one hand and a green bough in the other.

Eight warriors now took up the rough stretcher on which the body lay, turned it so that it was carried feet first, and the procession to the grave began, men, women and children

gashing and scratching their bodies with shells, until by the time they reached the grave-side every one was running with blood. It looked to Rashleigh as though the people vied with each other as to who should cut themselves the deepest in evidence of grief for the departed chief.

The burial-ground, like the council place, commanded a view of the sea, and Rashleigh noticed that, although it was only lightly timbered, each of the graves had been dug near a tree. He was amazed to realize that in all his long sojourn with the tribe he had never seen this place before, although he must have passed near it often; and when he noticed that the bark of each grave-tree had been stripped to leave the trunk bare for an area of about two feet by one, his astonishment increased. On these bare spaces he saw that crude designs had been carved representing kangaroos, bandicoots, snakes, and birds. The larger trees he saw had several such memorials engraved upon them, corresponding to the number of graves which had been made around them.

The body was laid upon the ground, a green bough being placed in the right hand of the dead carandjie, which lay across his breast. Then every member of the tribe walked round the corpse making a farewell obeisance, wailing and gashing their bodies anew during the ceremony. The grave was a pit about five feet square and eight feet deep, in which were standing four upright stakes with sheets of bark forming a kind of box, and two poles to serve as skids were placed at one side. Rashleigh and the new carandjie then placed the body on the skids and held it there until the instant when the sun showed above the horizon, when they let go their hold, and the body slid gently down to remain erect, held by the four upright stakes, facing towards the sea. Armed with paddles a number of the warriors shovelled earth into the pit, between the sides and the bark walls of

THE MEMOIRS OF

the rough sepulchre, while others leapt in to tread the earth firm, until it reached the level of the head. The deceased's weapons were now placed in the bark tomb, which was then covered by another sheet of bark, so that no earth should press against the body. The pit was then filled in, and a neat mound nearly three feet in height was beaten smooth with paddles over it. The ceremony ended with the carving of a fish hawk on the nearest tree, the significance of the emblem being to suggest the name of the carandjie, which would be translated as The Swooping Warrior.

Ralph Rashleigh, sensible though he was of all that he owed to the old man, felt during the whole of this ceremony nothing deeper than the quality of grief that a man endures at the death of a dog or a horse to which he has been attached. He had never been able to consider the ugly and revolting old carandjie as really human, and there had been none of that tenderness of comradeship which might have aroused normal human affection between them. He soon discovered, however, that he had owed his safety and freedom from molestation to the powerful influence of the dead man, who had managed to hold in check the savage antipathy which the warriors felt towards him because of his mental superiority and the favouritism he enjoyed from their headman. From the attitude of the tribesmen towards him now that he had lost that protection, he realized that they would readily kill him but for the superstitious belief that the spirit of the old carandjie was haunting the place, ready to avenge any injury which might be done to his adopted white son.

This superstitious fear, however, began to dwindle before a month had passed, for one day Terrawelo, the new carandjie, informed Rashleigh that he must either give up to him the two djins of his predecessor, or fight for the right

to keep them. Rashleigh's only reason for keeping the two djins had been their own expressed desire to remain with him, rather than go to any of the blacks, who would not treat them so well; but now the manner of contemptuous superiority with which Terrawelo presented his demand made him determined to keep them. He also knew from experience in friendly contests in the past that he was the muscular superior of any man in the tribe, who in spite of their large bodies were poor specimens of humanity.

Rashleigh therefore told the new chief that he intended to accept his challenge and fight according to usage, which prescribed that any man possessing two or more wives must yield up all except one to any man who proved himself stronger or more expert in the use of weapons than he. Terrawelo's answer was an attempted blow with a nullah-nullah at the white man's head. Rashleigh, who had been watching the black's eyes, dodged, thrust his head between Terrawelo's legs and, with a heave, flung him violently over his back to the ground. Snatching up the fallen warrior's weapon, he dealt him a crashing blow which broke the arm which the chief had raised to protect his head. He was about to strike again, but recovered his self-control, flung the waddy down and called to the chief's djin to come and help her man away. Jumba came running up, yelling something about the chief being killed, and tried to secure Rashleigh, who, after warning him, struck him senseless to the ground and walked quietly over to his own fire. Neither Jumba nor Terrawelo attempted to molest him during the day, but after this quarrel he became the object of the hate and fear of the blacks. His djins dared no more to go fishing or root-digging with the other women, who fell upon them and beat them mercilessly; indeed, the whole tribe seemed to be

THE MEMOIRS OF

in a conspiracy to make life as miserable as could be for them and their master.

One night, about a week after the fight, Lorra seemed to Rashleigh to be unusually silent and depressed, entirely unlike her cheery, chattering self. Usually she eagerly drew him out about the manners, customs and clothing of the women of his race, never tiring of hearing of their strangeness. This evening she scarcely spoke, but often glanced guardedly round the environs of their fire. He asked her whether she was ill, but her only reply was a caress; after which they lay down together and went to sleep. He was awakened suddenly by a piercing scream from Lorra, and, starting up, he saw her struggling wildly in Jumba's arms. As he rose to rush to help her, she cried to him in warning:

'Look behind you, Yaff; never mind Lorra.'

He wheeled round and saw Terrawelo, who, having already discharged one spear, which was quivering in the earth beside where Rashleigh had lain, was fixing another spear in his woomera. The Englishman wrenched the spent spear from the earth, and rushed upon the black before he could discharge his second spear, and plunged it into his abdomen with such force that it came out through his back close to the spine.

Lorra's cries were growing fainter, and, turning from his prone enemy, Rashleigh saw her on the ground and Jumba above her beating her with his nullah-nullah, the knobbed end of which weighed about ten pounds. Not waiting to pick up a weapon, he charged the cowardly black, whose back was towards him, and leaping so that his feet struck in the middle of his spine, brought him crashing to earth on his face. Before Jumba knew quite what had happened, Rashleigh caught the dropped nullah-nullah, and with a

single blow crushed in the black man's skull, instantly avenging the poor djin, who had just life enough to attempt to caress him as he bent over her, before falling back dead.

At this tragedy Rashleigh ran amok. He snatched up the club where he had let it fall after dispatching Jumba and rushed at Terrawelo, who was surrounded by friends in consultation about the wisdom of attempting to pull the spear from his body. Heedless of the screech of terror from the lips of the wounded chief, Rashleigh brought his club down upon his head, dashing out his brains. The chief's friends attacked him in a swarm, but the enraged white man brought three of them crashing to earth before he was disarmed and secured.

He was brought as a prisoner before the assembled tribe next morning for trial, the dead bodies of Terrawelo and Jumba being laid out surrounded by their wailing djins and relatives. Rashleigh was asked simply why he had killed the two warriors.

'There were three dead bodies last night,' he replied. 'Why are there only two this morning?'

A warrior leaped up in a fury and addressed the savage court.

'The white man means, brothers, where is the body of his djin,' he shouted in the native tongue, 'as if he meant to say that he had killed our Chief and Jumba to revenge her death. Let my black brothers teach the pale stranger that they do not so far worship weak women as to hold that her death could be any excuse for the fall of two brave warriors.'

'It is true,' rejoined Rashleigh, 'I killed Jumba and Terrawelo because they killed Lorra; but also they had tried to kill me, which they would have done had not my poor djin lost her life to save mine.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

'You had better cry for your djin like a child,' shouted the warrior scornfully. 'I should like to see a white man's tears.'

'That you may do,' said Rashleigh, seeing in this altercation a chance to get his limbs free. 'See if you can make them flow. Unbind my hands and give me a nullah-nullah and try . . . You will not? No, you are afraid, knowing well I would quickly make you weaker than any woman.'

An aged black interposed, whispering something in the angry warrior's ear, which caused him to nod his head acquiescently and sit down. The old fellow then made a round of all the elder warriors holding a consultation in low tones, finally returning to his place and sitting silent for a while.

'Pale stranger,' he began at last, 'you were once thrown out of the sea upon our fishing-ground, and a wise man, who is no more, but had been a mighty warrior in his younger days, saw in your face the likeness to a son who had passed away. Because of this he saved your life and made you into a warrior. For these things which were very good you have brought evil on our tribe. Two stout men who yesterday could have helped to defend us against our foes are to-day dead by your hand. For all this justice forbids us to take your life, because those two who are gone tried first to kill you before your club was lifted against them; but you may not stay with us longer lest the angry spirits of the departed take vengeance on the tribe for letting you live unpunished. Go, then, take your women, your dogs, and your weapons. The land is wide. Dwell where you will, but come no more near our hunting-ground. I have spoken. Do as I say. Well, my brothers?' An acquiescent grunt, usual on such occasions, came from the assembled warriors. 'Will you go, then, in peace and leave us?' he concluded.

'I will go,' said Rashleigh. 'The sun is as hot and the fish are as fat elsewhere as they are here.'

At a sign from the old orator, his bonds were loosened.

The ancient paused and looked around the encircling faces: 'If any of our black brethren do not like the decision of the elders, now that the pale stranger is free, let them attack him in the face of all the tribe, and take better vengeance for the fallen on fair and equal terms.'

Two warriors at once leaped to their feet, but the one who had taunted the prisoner claimed precedence, and it was arranged that they should fight at noon. Rashleigh thereupon retired to his fires, where he found his two surviving djins wailing and gashing themselves over the battered corpse of Lorra, which they had laid out ready for interment.

Rashleigh decided that he would not bury the body near the tribe, so he constructed a rough sort of hand-barrow into which he placed it. He then ordered the two djins to carry it northward along the beach as far as an inlet which was generally admitted to be the boundary of the fishing-ground belonging to the tribe. There they were to await his arrival, taking with them the dogs, his fishing tackle and all his weapons except the one which he was to use in the combat at noon.

The shadows of the trees were at their feet when all the tribe were duly assembled on their council ground overlooking the sea. The fight began instantly by Rashleigh's opponent, as usual, offering his head for a blow.

'Have done with such fooling,' shouted the white man, 'for if you put your head in my way again you will need no second blow.'

The black began by clumsy feinting, when Rashleigh iposted by also feinting as if to strike the man's head, and bringing his club round suddenly struck him heavily upon

his knee. The black fell prostrate, and as none came forward to help him, and every one seemed to be waiting to see the death-blow delivered, Rashleigh cried out scornfully, 'Take your warrior away; I will not rob your tribe of any more,' and then walked away from the astounded assembly in the direction in which his djins had gone.

The fight had been so short that he soon overtook the women, and lifting Lorra's body from the hand-cart, which he abandoned, he carried it in his arms, never stopping until night. At first he was irritated by the wailing of the two djins, and at last he ordered them sternly to desist; so that they went in silence until the day's march ended. They prepared a fire at the camping-place, and chattered as usual about their usual tasks. One of them, named Enee, came back presently with a huge boneta, which she had killed in a pool which had been left by the ebbing tide. The women prepared and cooked some slices, and begged Rashleigh to eat. His appetite, however, was lost in the grief he was feeling at the tragic death of his favourite and gallant little djin; and he bade them shortly to eat their food and get to sleep quickly.

He spent the night in a melancholy vigil over the remains of the girl who had loved him so well that she had not hesitated to draw Jumba's attack upon herself, in order to leave him free to deal with the dastardly Terrawelo. He pondered long on the devotion which Lorra had lavished upon him, always acting towards him as if he were some friendly god whom it was an honour to serve with love. She was the first woman who had ever given him affection, and as he took a last look at her, before going off to dig a grave, the thought passed through his mind that, however black her skin was, her heart was true.

He wrapped her in his best opossum-skin cloak, and

RALPH RASHLEIGH

buried her in a deep grave, with a thick layer of grasses to protect her body from the earth, under the shade of a hanging acacia tree growing beside a murmurous rivulet. As he shovelled the earth into the pit, tears ran down his cheeks, and a great sense of loss overwhelmed him. He lay mourning beside the grave all that day and the night that followed, watched secretly with awe and wonder by the two remaining djins. Next day they resumed their march, Rashleigh turning often to look back towards the spot where he had left the remains of the only woman, outside his family, who had ever loved him.

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR nearly six months after leaving the tribe, Rashleigh and his djins pursued the northerly course along the beach, crossing rivers by catamarans; sleeping under cliffs, in caverns or in the open according to opportunity and the weather. Their diet was chiefly fish, caught easily by torch-light, varied by cockles, oysters, limpets, and roots whenever they could be come by.

He passed through many tribes of coastal blacks, with some of whom he was able to converse. He assumed the character of a wandering carandjie, which he was able to sustain easily with the experience he had gained from his long association with his ancient foster-father, knowing how to paint signs upon his body and decorate himself in the traditional manner of the doctor-priests. He was, in consequence, never molested by the aborigines through whose territories he passed; but, on the contrary, was always received hospitably and allowed to remain as long as he wished in their camps, and to depart when he pleased. Frequently the warriors tried eagerly to persuade him to abandon his wandering life, and stay with them permanently as their carandjie.

This, however, he would not do, fatalistically pursuing his original plan of going northwards, which had been conceived at the start of his ill-omened journey with Roberts, Hennessey, Owen, and the rest, when they had succeeded in escaping the search of the crew of the Newcastle pilot-boat. He reached at last the most northerly point on the coast of New Holland, at the entrance to Torres Straits. From the crest of a lofty mountain he could see many small islands, which, he supposed, formed part of the Indian Archipelago; and he looked towards them with longing

as seats of that lost civilization to which he belonged. He found himself longing for his old companions, for he realized that, if even only Roberts had been spared, they might together have contrived some means to cross the strait, which, in spite of intricate channels formed by adverse currents, was negotiable in places.

He lay nearly the whole day on the mountain, looking out to sea and consumed with vain regrets and frustrated hopes; and when he returned to the beach at nightfall he found the djins much alarmed at his prolonged absence. They resumed their march next morning and had not gone far when, with a thrill of excitement, he saw about a mile from shore the hulk of a wrecked vessel which, from the mountain top, he had taken to be part of one of the rocks on which she lay.

The tide was running out and the sea was calm, but he feared to attempt the swim because of the numerous sharks which infested the waters. There was no wood at hand for the construction of a catamaran, but, explaining to the djins his intention of trying to reach the wreck, he sent them along the shore to search for any timbers that might have been washed up, whilst he occupied himself in plaiting into cords all the fishing-lines they carried, for tying together the timbers of the raft he hoped to build.

He was interrupted by Tita, one of the djins, 'cooe-ing' loudly to him from a spot some distance along the beach, and making excited signs. Hastening over to her, he found one of the tops of the wrecked ship, with the bodies of four seamen lashed to it, all in an advanced stage of decomposition. He cut loose the fastenings and, digging a great hole in the sand, buried the bodies of the four unfortunate men together. As the djins were helping him drag the corpses to the hole, a considerable quantity of gold coins rolled from

THE MEMOIRS OF

the pocket of one of the men. The djins, attracted by the glitter of the shining metal, refused to do another hand's turn in helping Rashleigh with his gruesome task, until they had collected all they could find. He was anxious to complete his last offices to the drowned men, and knew that the money was in any case useless in his present circumstances.

When the simple burial was completed, they searched further and found two strong booms which, with the top, Rashleigh soon lashed together into a raft large enough for his immediate need. He fashioned two rough paddles from scraps of wood for the djins, and made a longer steering paddle for himself. He launched the raft immediately it was ready, and in a short time, helped by the falling tide and the djins' vigorous paddling, reached the wreck.

The ill-fated vessel, a sailing ship of some five hundred tons burthen, was stripped of masts, bulwarks and fore-castle, her foredeck having been literally swept bare by the gale which seemed to have just missed cutting her in two abaft the main chains. She lay canted to one side in an indentation on the reef, which upheld her as firmly as the stocks upon which she had been built, and to Rashleigh it seemed a hopeless task to try to get aboard her. Not a rope hung down, and the bowsprit having been carried away close to the head, neither bridle nor martingale remained over which a rope could be thrown.

The only thing he could see that offered any hope was a stanchion still standing near the fore-chains. He took the cord which he had made ashore and fastened to the end a stone which Enee used for a sinker to her fishing-line. With this he went round to the lower side of the wreck, casting the weighted end towards the stanchion in the hope that it would twist round in such a way as to enable him to haul himself on deck. He desisted only when he was too tired

to throw, and sat down in despair, and was puzzling his brains for some alternative scheme when Enee touched him on the arm and, taking up the weighted line, said, 'Me try now.' Rashleigh smiled as she began to coil the rope in her left hand and to swing the loaded end round her head with a peculiar action. With a jerk she let the end fly from her hand, and next instant the rope was fixed fast to the stanchion.

After testing the rope Rashleigh climbed to the sloping deck, and slipped down the open companion-way which led to the principal cabin. Everything was in confusion, and as he gazed round he was startled to hear a low moan as of a human being in pain come from the direction of one of the sleeping-berths beyond. The door was jammed, and he had to knock out two of the panels before he could enter. What, at first glance, he took to be a pile of clothing lying on the bunk, he found to be bed-coverings, under which lay the bodies of two women and a child, all emaciated by starvation, and seemingly dead.

He gently turned over the woman nearest to him, and at his touch her eyes flickered open and a piteous moan escaped her. Seeing the bearded face of a black man peering at her, she shuddered and clutched her babe convulsively to her bony breast. She looked into Rashleigh's eyes with a gaze so touchingly pathetic in its pleading that tears sprang to his eyes. He recovered himself immediately, and at once set off in search of food and drink with which to revive the women and child. There was nothing in the main cabin, but after a search forward he found wine and a keg of water, which he carried back to the sleeping-quarters. Among the debris in the cabin he found a tumbler, in which he mixed a little wine with water, with which he moistened the lips of the three sufferers, and was overjoyed to find that the

THE MEMOIRS OF

second woman was also alive. The child at first drank eagerly, and then began to cry: 'Mamma, mamma, take the black man away.'

The mother put her arm round the child in a feeble but reassuring caress, while Rashleigh left them and went on deck. He threw the end of a rope taken from the sailors' quarters to the djins, bidding them make the raft fast and come on board. As he waited for them he looked round anxiously to see what the weather portents were, as the day was far advanced and he wished to stay aboard until morning if it were likely to be safe to do so. He realized that if it were to blow at all hard the ship could not survive the battering of the waves for more than four or five hours. He could see no signs of wind or broken weather, but he decided to confirm his opinion, and when Enee came on deck he asked her what she thought. She looked round, and at once replied, 'Very much hot day to-morrow will be.' Telling her to go below, he repeated his question to Tita as she reached the deck. Tita made a much longer survey, but at last gave the same opinion as Enee that it would be 'a very much hot day to-morrow.' This opinion from women of a race who have an uncanny sense in such matters set Rashleigh's mind at rest, and he went below to find Enee wonder-struck by all the strangeness around her, and the child crying lustily for food. He set the djins to work to light some sort of fire in the cabin grate and went off in search of food. He came upon what he took to be the steward's room, in which he found some tins of preserved meat, biscuits, flour, tea, sugar, and other eatables, with a quantity of which he returned to the cabin, taking a tea-kettle with him. He found the djins had got going a good fire, but were superstitiously scared by the sound of its roaring in the chimney; and it was not until he had

explained to them that it was only the draught and the smoke that caused the noise that they were convinced that the sound was not of supernatural origin. He then, with the help of the djins, concocted a weak soup into which he crumbled some biscuit, and spoon-fed the women and the child in turn.

He himself sat down to the first plentiful meal of European food which he had tasted for nearly five years, eating salted beef and biscuit washed down with tea with almost childish relish. Tita and Enee gorged themselves upon great quantities of biscuits soaked in strongly sweetened tea. It was not going to be easy to get the women and child ashore, as they were all far too weak to help themselves in any way, and the dangerous state of the wreck made it imperative that they should leave it at the earliest possible moment. He determined to construct a larger raft from the hatches and gratings of the vessel, and lower the women and child in a cot on to it, with all the foodstuffs and useful furniture that he could find, and tow it ashore with the smaller catamaran.

He could see that the hull would be battered to pieces if a storm should blow up, and he and the djins worked desperately through the night, and before morning had a large, serviceable raft finished. They then collected all the useful movable articles; Enee lowered them to Rashleigh as fast as Tita could hand them to her. By daybreak all was in readiness, and Rashleigh, finding that the tide was now running out, attended to his invalid charges, and lay down to sleep. The sun was high when he woke and the tide was running in strongly. He carried a large cot on deck and secured it firmly to the stanchion, and returned to bring the two women and child. The infant clung desperately to its mother so that he had perforce to carry the pair of them

THE MEMOIRS OF

together, an easy task as, in their emaciated condition, they were no heavier than a young child.

By means of a cunning arrangement of ropes he eased the cot overside and down to the raft, the two djins standing ready to place it safely. Rashleigh then lowered himself, and cast away, the two djins bent to their paddles, and he steered to a spot near some beetling cliffs which looked as though it would provide good shelter and concealment. On landing he and Tita carried the laden cot to a place overhung by a great rock forming a kind of roof, and, making a rough bed of some sails which he had brought off the ship, he placed the women and child upon it. The freight was then landed, and leaving the rescued people and the camp in charge of Enee with instructions as to signals should any blacks approach, Rashleigh returned to the wreck. He had little fear of blacks arriving, as the soil was very dry and poor in the vicinity, and there were no swamps or dense thickets in which were to be found the favourite foods of the aborigines.

His purpose in returning to the wreck was to search for anything that he might have so far overlooked that might be serviceable for the comfort of the derelicts whom fate had thrown into his charge. He was relieved to find a plentiful supply of women's clothes in a trunk, as well as a large quantity of provisions which he had previously overlooked. In a desk in the cabin he found a large quantity of writing materials and a considerable sum in the form of bills of exchange, all of which he took, overjoyed especially at the prospect of being able to write again after years of compulsory neglect. Also he found the carpenter's tools, firearms and ammunition.

The transportation of all that he wished to take ashore occupied him and Tita the whole of the day and far into the

night. They laboured without rest at the fatiguing task, as there were ominous signs of a storm brewing, and they had not got ashore with their final load more than half an hour when a low moaning was heard coming out of the south-west, and in less than an hour a violent tempest was lashing the sea into a fury of waves. Rashleigh felt a great joy in his heart as he watched the leaping foam-flecked waters, and uttered a silent prayer of thanksgiving that he had arrived when he did, and not thirty-six hours later, when the wreck would have been engulfed and the women and child drowned. A torrential rain began to fall, so he fixed a sail at the entrance of their cave-like retreat, and, making sure that they were well above high-water mark, he lay down and slept.

He awoke at daybreak to a quiet morning, rain and wind having ceased, though the sea still ran high, and the land glistened with the refreshing moisture. Great breakers were foaming skywards against the reef on which the wreck had been, but no sign of the vessel remained, except a few scraps of wreckage that were floating on the sea and a few planks that had been washed ashore during the storm.

For over a week Rashleigh occupied his time in building a rough dwelling under the rock which he had first selected, and where he meant to remain. It was both invisible and inaccessible from the land, and gave him a continuous watch upon the sea for passing vessels, one of which he hoped some day to signal. He put up stanchions, made from the jetsam of the wreck, across the seaward entrance to the cave, and nailed planking across, so that they had a stout wall to protect them from the weather. He had brought from the wreck, with this building in mind, a door and four windows, which he now fixed, and was at last satisfied that he had a little house fit to shelter his unexpected guests. He then

THE MEMOIRS OF

set to work to divide the place into three compartments, one of which was to serve as a combination of store and living-room, and the other two as bedrooms, one for the three castaways and the other for Rashleigh and his djins. The partitions were made of lengths of sails, the walls of rock being covered with the same material.

The two ladies remained in a state bordering on torpor during their first few days ashore, lacking the strength to speak or to help themselves in any way; but, by the time Rashleigh had completed his house-building, they had revived sufficiently to be able to express their thanks to him for all that they owed him. The child recuperated more quickly and was now running about: he was seven years of age and very small for his years. The mother told him that the ill-fated vessel was named the *Tribune*, which had brought convicts from England, and had then been bound, in ballast, for Calcutta, whither she had been going with her sister and child, to join her husband, a Captain Marby.

The ladies had lost exact count of time, but it had been, they thought, ten days before Rashleigh arrived that the *Tribune* had struck the reef. It had been blowing only moderately at the time, said Mrs. Marby, but the impact of the crash had jammed the door of the sleeping-berth in which they had been lying half dead with sea-sickness. They had heard someone come and try to open the door, and soon after the sounds of the crew taking to the boats. Distracted with fear, the unfortunate women struggled until their strength was spent in futile efforts to force the door, and had at last given up in despair and lain down to die. Rashleigh, listening to their account of what had happened, and recalling the four corpses he had found lashed to the top, concluded that hardship and famine had made their memories uncertain, and that the callous desertion of the

crew as well as the comparative temperateness of the weather were figments of their imaginations.

All the consultations which they held as to the best means for escaping from their present situation ended in the same way. There was nothing to do but wait in the hope of being picked up by a passing ship, Rashleigh pointing out that he could by no means guarantee, even in his character as a wandering carandjie, to protect the white women from hostile blacks whom they would be bound to encounter if they set out along the beach for the hundreds of miles' journey to a white settlement. The policy of waiting was at least hopeful, as two or three vessels left Sydney for India during each year and their route took them past that coast. Rashleigh searched the neighbourhood for the best point at which to fix the signal of distress, and at last selected the point of a promontory standing well out to sea, and there he erected a pole and fixed upon it, reversed, a Union Jack which he had found in a locker on the *Tribune*, and also ordered one of the djins to build a smoking fire at the spot every morning. His hope was that the smoke would attract attention, and that the flag would reveal to mariners that the fire was a signal from English folk in distress.

The queerly assorted party lived a simple and abstemious life, eating sparingly of the provisions which they had salvaged from the ship, so that they might have for as long as possible some normal food for the ladies and the boy. Fish was the staple article of diet, and they discovered a vegetable plant not unlike spinach, which, boiled with salt beef, proved a palatable addition to their meagre bill of fare. Their water was supplied by a small spring in one of the adjacent cliffs, which provided a quantity just sufficient for their absolute requirements.

Rashleigh had refrained from revealing his true race to

THE MEMOIRS OF

the ladies, who believed his story that he was a New Holland aborigine, who had learned English and the ways of the whites through having been brought up from infancy until his twentieth year in the family of an eminent officer of the Colonial Government at Sydney, on whose death he had returned to the life of a savage, which he preferred to the work and restraint of civilized society. His subterfuge was safe from betrayal by the djins, whom he had cautioned to say nothing, as they were genuinely attached to him, and also feared him, not only for his superior strength and knowledge, but for a reason grounded in superstition.

This superstition sprung from a belief prevalent among the aborigines that all the whites who made their appearance in Australia were reincarnations of the spirits of departed blacks. When a native saw a white person for the first time, he always gave him a native name derived from a fancied resemblance to some dead member of his own tribe, and it was in conformity with this notion that the ancient carandjie had given Rashleigh the name of Bealla, which denoted a peculiarity in the walk of one of the old fellow's sons who had fallen in battle years before. This naming of the whites was the only way in which the blacks were permitted to recall, or make reference to the dead; and they believed that persons so adopted by them possessed all the knowledge they had acquired by native usages in their previous black existence, in addition to the arts and knowledge of the white civilization. Consequently the djins regarded Rashleigh with awe as well as with affection, believing him to be possessed of double powers, and able to know the motives of actions and all things past and present.

Months passed in a monotony only relieved for the two white women by the interest and fun they derived from

teaching the djins the manners of the white races, which the black girls learnt eagerly, and were particularly keen upon dressing themselves in any scraps of clothing which the ladies could spare. Rashleigh occupied himself with the camp duties of providing fuel and fish, keeping his arms in good condition, and in teaching the djins to read. Towards the white women he maintained the attitude of a respectful native, serving them faithfully, and never taking the least advantage of their being helpless in his power.

Daily he went to the beacon hill, and though he saw no sail, hope remained alive. Some day a ship was bound to come and take them off the inhospitable coast. One day, in the eighth month, as he stood there looking out to sea as usual, he turned his gaze northwards and was perturbed to see at a considerable distance in that direction the smoke of many fires betokening a camp of blacks. These were the first signs of the aborigines that he had seen since settling in the cave, and he decided to reconnoitre and discover their dispositions and intentions, in case they stumbled upon the habitation under the cliff.

He refrained from making a fire, pulled down the post and flag, and hurried back to the cave to inform the women of what he had seen, telling them that it was imperative that they should go upon a scouting expedition. He was astonished to discover, from the scene which followed, how entirely the white women depended upon him for their peace of mind. Mrs. Marby begged him in moving words that he would not betray or desert them, and her sister and the boy added their separate entreaties, weeping at the prospect of being left even for a short time without him. He succeeded at last in assuring them that they had nothing to fear from any action of his, and persuaded them of the necessity of his going.

THE MEMOIRS OF

At nightfall he took off the sailor's dress which he had been wearing since the wreck, and, preparing himself in the guise of a carandjie, set out with a double-barrelled gun and a pair of pistols concealed in his opossum-skin belt. The strange camp was several miles distant and he did not reach it until early morning, while it was still dark. The number of fires made it clear to him that the tribe was numerous, and according to native custom he walked straight through to the chief's fire, unmolested by the many dogs which came up and sniffed him as he passed. The chief lay asleep and alone, so Rashleigh made up the fire, sat down and smoked in silence until the savage awoke. Seeing one whom he judged to be a carandjie sitting there and eating smoke, he sat up and addressed the stranger:

'Is my brother carandjie hungry that he devours the wind of fire?' he asked.

'I devour the fire-wind to make me wise, but not to satisfy my hunger,' replied Rashleigh.

'Is the tribe of my brother far away?'

'My fathers dwelt many moons nearer to the rain than this; but I wander through the lands at my pleasure.'

'Does my brother,' continued the chief curiously, 'travel so far without a djin to wait upon him?'

'A wise man waits upon himself,' answered Rashleigh solemnly. 'But,' he added meaningly, 'all the djins of the weakest are mine.'

'That is true and just,' assented the black. 'But is not my brother lonely for want of company?'

'I need no company but my own thoughts and the spirits of the wise men who are departed, but who hover round us everywhere, ready to come to anyone who is bold enough to call them.'

At this statement the chief rose, casting a fearful glance

round him, and, replenishing the fire with a handful of dry fuel, looked long and earnestly at his visitor. During this scrutiny Rashleigh calmly refilled his pipe, adding a few grains of powder to the tobacco. At length the chief remarked in an awe-stricken whisper: "Tis very true, our fathers have told us that the spirits of the dead are everywhere, but none of our tribe ever thought it safe to call on them. Do these dreadful visitants never try to injure the hardy warrior who seeks their company?"

'Be certain, my brother,' said Rashleigh, 'that not every carandjie can control the tempers of the dead. He, however, who can speak to them with words of fire, need never fear aught they can do.'

As he spoke, the gunpowder in his pipe flared up, and at such a striking commentary to his words, the chief immediately gave signs of the deep respect in which he held the stranger, and Rashleigh was satisfied with the effect he had made.

At daybreak the camp was in commotion and Rashleigh was thronged by warriors eagerly seeking news of the movements of the tribes along the coast. He told them all he knew and was pleased to see that all he said was news to them. A hunt was proposed, during which he was able to add to the effect he had made as a marvellous carandjie, by his prowess with his gun. A great feast was held in honour of his visit, and during the ensuing drunkenness he slipped away unobserved, thus adding to the impression of magical powers which would stand him in good stead in the case of trouble later.

To prevent the blacks from tracking him, he swam part of the way back and reached the cavern unmolested. Thereafter he refrained from lighting the beacon fire and flying the flag, he and Enee sharing look-out watches for ships.

THE MEMOIRS OF

The tribe remained for many weeks in the neighbourhood in which Rashleigh had found them, and during this time he paid them repeated visits, always contriving his appearances and withdrawals in so sudden and mysterious a manner that they came to regard him as having the power to make himself invisible at will.

One night, oppressed by anxiety and the lack of any sign of rescue, he had wandered to the top of a neighbouring hill, from which he saw signs that the blacks were holding a night council, such as was only held in times of great emergency. Swiftly he assumed his disguise as a carandjie and hastened towards the camp of the tribe. He paused on the outskirts, and saw that the warriors, armed and equipped for battle, were engaged in a frightful war dance of the kind used to stimulate themselves to the highest pitch of ferocity in preparation for an important enterprise. The dance was accompanied by an extemporaneous song reciting the great exploits of their past warriors of renown, and bragging of the manner in which they would outdo them during the fight they were about to begin.

Rashleigh knew enough of their language to gather, from the fragments of the song which he heard, that there was not far off a ship manned by white men in some sort of distress, and that its commander, foolishly thinking to purchase the goodwill of these treacherous savages, had treated them kindly and had made them gifts of the geegaws used in barter, and had evidently been mad enough to give them rum. Having learnt this much Rashleigh slipped unobserved among the excited mob, appearing suddenly, and laying his hand on the chief's shoulder.

The chief gave a loud cry of alarm and turned, but seeing the mysterious carandjie, said in a sulky tone: 'My brother is welcome – if he comes as a friend.'

'Your lips speak words that are not in your heart,' replied Rashleigh. 'You do not wish me to be here, lest I should defeat your intended attack on the big canoe of the white strangers.'

'My brother knows everything,' cried Tocalli, the chief, in great surprise, 'but he will join our tribe in plundering the pale rulers of the wind.'

'First tell me, O Tocalli, whether you love your own people?'

'Why should the wise carandjie ask that?' demanded the mystified chief. 'He knows I do.'

'Then, if you do, let the white men depart in peace. They have plenty weapons like mine, and even if you conquer them, many of your tribe must die. And what will happen to those that are left: can you tell me that, O Tocalli?'

The black shook his head and made no other answer.

'Then I will tell you. The fire water of the white men will make them mad; they will drink till they fight, fight till they kill, and kill till none remains alive.'

'Tis no matter,' cried Tocalli defiantly. 'My brother speaks with the words of a coward. He looks like a man, but his heart is that of a djin.'

During this talk they had strayed to the edge of the sea, at a spot which Rashleigh had previously marked, and while the chief was speaking he put a small quantity of gunpowder into his pipe, and as it exploded and dazzled the black, Rashleigh slipped into the water and swam quickly to the side of the bay where, he guessed from what he had heard, were some goods belonging to the white men.

He wandered about the shore for some minutes before he found the expected stores, and he decided to conceal himself in the middle of them until morning, when he hoped that he would have some opportunity to warn the white men of

their danger. He determined that if he could hit upon no other way, he would take the risk of the shark-infested water and swim off to the vessel, which he judged would be within easy distance. In the morning twilight he saw the ship to which the natives had referred as the big canoe. It was a schooner, as nearly as he could judge of about one hundred tons burthen, which had gone ashore on the point of a low-lying sandy islet. Gazing at her in the increasing light, with the hope of rescue at last strong within him, he saw two heavily laden boats put off and start towards the point where he lay concealed. The blacks also began to appear, some of them making a pretence of fishing near the pile of stores, while a few of the more important, with Tocalli in their midst, walked right up to where Rashleigh was hiding, laughing and evidently in the highest spirits. He crouched low, for, although they seemed unarmed, he saw that they carried short clubs in the tufts of opossum skin which hung from their belts behind.

Rashleigh, certain that some treacherous attack was imminent, held himself ready for action the moment the boats touched the shore. A man, who was evidently the captain of the schooner, stepped on to the beach and held out a hand to Tocalli, who had approached him. Rashleigh saw the malignant gleam in the chief's eye as he extended his left hand to grasp the right hand of the captain, while with his right he gripped the concealed club. In a glance the watcher saw that, as the sailors landed, each of them was similarly greeted by one of the blacks. The chief, Tocalli, swung his club, and instantly Rashleigh's gun spoke, and the cunning black fell without a cry, a bullet through his brain.

The sham carandjie leapt at once from his hiding-place.

'Beware, white men,' he yelled, 'these treacherous brutes mean to murder the lot of you.'

The sailors needed no warning that foul play was intended, for, at Tocalli's signal, each of the blacks had seized one of them, and they were about to imitate their chief when the unexpected report of the gun and the fall of Tocalli startled them for an instant, giving the sailors time to break loose and retreat to their boats.

The captain was calling to them to come back, when Rashleigh interposed, suggesting that they should make for the ship with all speed and return with arms; the sailors having been so deluded by the apparent friendliness of the blacks that they had come ashore without so much as a pistol or a cutlass among them. The skipper had only time to shout his orders to his men before the blacks, enraged at the death of their chief, closed together and rushed at the white men with spears, boomerangs and clubs, which had been brought by reserves who had been hiding in the thicket that fringed the beach. The first volley of spears brought down one of the sailors, but before they could bring the fight to close quarters Rashleigh fired into them with both barrels of his gun, and, as they paused, blazed at them with his pistol. This treatment at the hands of the mysterious carandjie terrified the leaderless warriors, who turned tail and fled to the cover of the thicket. There they remained, and no further incident occurred before the boat's crew returned with a supply of arms, and with the cheering information that the ship was now almost afloat on the rising tide. A pull or two on the forrard anchor they said, and the schooner would be riding free.

The captain's first thought was for his ship, and he at once proposed that they should all return to her and get her clear of the bank. Rashleigh volunteered his help, offering to remain and stand guard over the stores, provided they would leave with him the arms they had brought ashore.

This friendly offer the captain at first refused, declaring that he would not for twenty times as valuable a quantity of goods dream of allowing the man, who had so gallantly saved them from wholesale slaughter by the blacks, to take any further risk on their behalf. Rashleigh, however, persisted that his plan should be adopted, and explained to the captain that he knew his countrymen well enough to be sure that they were extremely unlikely to renew the attack, especially now that they must know that he had a number of guns. The other allowed himself to be persuaded to return to the schooner with all his men to get her right off the bank, and Rashleigh remained with a row of fire-arms, ready cocked, laid out upon packing-cases, patrolling the spot with his double-barrelled gun in his hand.

He kept a keen watch shorewards, but he saw no sign of any blacks, and at first the only sound that broke the quietude was the murmur of the waves breaking on the beach. The sailors had evidently reached the ship again, for he could hear their capstan chanty coming across the water. He turned to watch whether they were going to succeed in pulling off the bank. For some minutes their efforts were ineffectual, but then he saw her plainly moving and she was just running into free water when Rashleigh was struck in the back of his leg by a spear. He turned as a flight of spears fell all around him among the ship's stores, and cursed himself for a fool for having relaxed his vigilance. For some moments he could see no one, nor could he guess from what point the attack had been made, until he saw a head appear from behind a sandbank. Before the black had time to move, Rashleigh brought his gun to his shoulder and fired. The man sprang high in his last convulsion and fell dead, as another volley of spears was flung, one of them piercing Rashleigh's shoulder.

He dropped quickly behind a cask, crouching to pull the spear from his leg; and the blacks, evidently thinking that he had been brought down by one of their spears, rose from their cover and came towards him at a run. He dropped one of them, but the rest had apparently overcome their fear of the noise of the gun, and rushed him before he had time to lift another musket. The only thing to do was to club his fowling piece and lay about him in the hope of keeping them at bay until help arrived from the ship. He had felled several of the enemy when one husky black sprang in and caught him round the middle. Rashleigh let fall his weapon and wrestled his man, the pair coming to the ground with a crash, and rolling over and over until for a second Rashleigh had the other flat on his back. Without hesitation he snatched his pistol from his belt and fired point-blank into his opponent's face, killing him instantly. He was about to leap to his feet when he heard shots coming from the sea, and saw the blacks making off at a great pace towards cover. He, therefore, lay still until the firing ceased.

The captain landed with the crew of the boat, and gave a yell of delight when he saw Rashleigh rise and come towards him, wounded and bleeding, but alive. He insisted upon rowing him straight out to his vessel and having his wounds properly dressed by the steward, all the time pouring out his gratitude to Rashleigh for the great services he had done him that day. He told the wounded man that his schooner was the *Sea Mew*, of Sydney, homeward bound from a trading trip among the Fiji Islands. When his wounds had been dressed, Rashleigh told the captain the story of the wreck of the *Tribune* and his rescue of the three survivors, and discovered that he had heard of the ship and had actually left, at Timor Coupang, a vessel which had been dispatched from New South Wales by Colonel Wood-

THE MEMOIRS OF RALPH RASHLEIGH

ville, Mrs. Marby's father, in search of his daughters and grandson. News that the women and child were left on board had been reported by a party of the craven crew of the *Tribune* who had successfully made the southward voyage in their boat to Fort Macquarie.

The captain told Rashleigh that every one who knew them would be delighted at the rescue, as Colonel Woodville was greatly respected by all classes of colonists, and was known to be seriously ill as a result of the shock of the feared loss of his daughters. He volunteered at once to take them on board as soon as he had got through the job of reloading his stores, after which he would sail round to the bay on the shores of which the crude cavern dwelling stood.

They arrived early on the following morning, the mood of the ladies and the djins vaulting suddenly from the despair into which Rashleigh's prolonged absence had flung them, to delirious happiness at the immediate prospect of leaving the gloomy cavern, and voyaging at once to Sydney. Rashleigh was regarded by rescued and rescuers as a hero, and the captain granted his request for a passage for himself and the djins, asserting that if Rashleigh had not come of his own free will he would have pressed him by main force. Before evening the anchor was weighed, and the *Sea Mew* set sail for Sydney.

CHAPTER XXV

THE excitement of getting away at last from the lair on the inhospitable coast died down for Rashleigh as he pondered on his probable fate at the end of the voyage. His mind was heavy with forebodings, despite the fact that he could fairly expect consideration from Colonel Woodville for his services in rescuing and protecting his daughters and grandchild. The cold fact remained that he was a doubly-convicted felon: and, from what he had heard from the ladies and the captain of the character of the Colonel, he had little doubt but that, however repugnant it might be to him as the father of the rescued ladies, he would none the less do his duty to the State by handing Rashleigh over to the authorities to be dealt with. He knew only too well the attitude law-abiding colonists would take towards one who had been concerned in an escape which had entailed an act of daring piracy and the death of at least one Army officer. He would have to make restitution with his own life.

It occurred to him with some faint stirrings of hope that, as all the rest of the party with whom he had escaped were dead, and there was no one to prove that he was personally concerned in that affair, he might be able to concoct some credible story which would convict him of nothing but successful escape, unassociated with the worse crimes of piracy and murder. Escapes from the lime-burners' camp were frequent, and it was not unusual for convicts to throw in their lot with the blacks. If, he decided, he could carry off the tale that he had simply disappeared in the ordinary way, his future would be hardly blacker than it had been before his escape. Probably he would be sentenced to fifty or a hundred lashes, and either returned to finish his

term at Coal River, or even revert to the status of an ordinary convict.

The day before the *Sea Mew* was expected to arrive at Sydney he went to Mrs. Marby and, after apologizing to her for his apparent deception, told her the truth about himself, omitting any details about the actual circumstances of his escape, while frankly admitting that he was a runaway. He begged her that she would, in consideration of the services he had rendered to her, intercede on his behalf with her father to obtain from the Governor a pardon for his offence of escaping.

Mrs. Marby listened to his story with increasing surprise, but without giving any hint of revulsion from him at finding that the man who had seemed to her a hero was really a convict masquerading as an aborigine.

'There is no question of what you must do at present,' she said as he stood uncertainly before her, awaiting her comment. 'You must continue in your character as a black. You have been successful in deceiving me, my sister, and the captain and crew of the ship, and there can be no difficulty in continuing to do so for a few days more. I shall, of course, do everything I can to persuade my father to help you, but it may be that his official position will make it difficult or impossible. Anyhow, you must remain to everybody but me the aboriginal black they all believe you to be, until I tell you to reveal the truth.'

Rashleigh promised to be guided entirely by her; and for some moments she paced the cabin.

'Oh,' she resumed suddenly, with fervour, 'I cannot bear to think of you losing your freedom as a result of saving our lives. That would be too dreadful. I would sooner you went back to the bush again, and lived on with the blacks, than that you should go back to suffer the miseries which

you tell me you endured on the Coal River.' She held out her hand to him with great friendliness: 'You can rely upon me to do everything I possibly can to win my father's interest for you.'

Her transparent sincerity filled Rashleigh with new hope, and he lay down to sleep that night with an easier mind than he had known since the voyage started.

When he awakened the *Sea Mew* was already running up the harbour of Port Jackson, and when he emerged from his berth it was to surprise the captain by appearing in his full native dress, with painted body, opossum-skin cloak, and hair decorated by Enee with grass and feathers. Hitherto he had always worn European clothes, which he had taken from the lockers of the *Tribune*, but, following Mrs. Marby's instructions, he went ashore as a full-blooded black.

Colonel Woodville was immediately informed of the safe arrival of his daughters, but was too ill to come down to the quay to meet them. A carriage was sent down to take the sisters to the house, and Mrs. Marby asked Rashleigh to go with them. On reaching the house he was taken in charge by the servants, who idolized their master's daughters and were very cordial in their welcome to the man, black though he might be, who had been responsible for their safe return home. At the same time they treated him just as they would any ordinary black, using him as a butt for their absurd jokes, much to his astonishment and annoyance. Rashleigh quickly dispelled this derisive attitude by showing himself well able to act in a civilized manner, explaining to them that he had been reared in a white family. They looked upon him as some sort of a monstrosity at this, being quite unable to understand how any man, having once enjoyed the advantages of civilization,

THE MEMOIRS OF

could return to the life in the bush. They then told him that an apartment was to be provided for him and his djins, by the express orders of Colonel Woodville.

In the afternoon Mrs. Marby sent for him and explained that the joyous shock of their safety, after so long a period of suspense, had given her father a set-back in health, and that, therefore, it would be unwise to speak to him yet about Rashleigh's predicament. She told him that the Colonel was most anxious to see his daughters' deliverer as soon as he could to thank him personally for all that he had done for them; and meanwhile he begged that Rashleigh would bring his djins with him and make his home in the house, having declared that as long as he had a shilling left Bealla and his womenfolk should have part of it.

Rashleigh thanked Mrs. Marby warmly, and accepted her father's invitation, saying that he would return to the *Sea Mew* for that night and bring Enee and Tita with him in the morning. He asked her not to press him to take the money she offered him, as he had sufficient for his needs in his belt, and, in any case, was to be away only one night. Captain Bell greeted him eagerly when he got back on board, where he found his two djins impatiently waiting to show him what looked like a whole milliner's shop of finery which the captain and crew had bought for them. He stood staring at his two faithful companions, who, with the help of the steward, had robed themselves in an astonishing assortment of white women's clothes, reminding him of characters like Poll Blazer of Portsmouth Point in startling conspicuousness. They strutted before him full of such a swagger of childish pride in their new possessions which made them so like their white sisters that Rashleigh broke into helpless laughter, discomfiting them entirely. Captain Bell, however, restored their spirits by asserting that they

were to take no notice of him, as he was only jealous at not being able to cut a dash himself. Hearing this, the affectionate Enee at once pulled off her bonnet and begged her Bealla to wear it, and only when he promised her that he would go and dress himself up in character with them would she put the bonnet back on her own head.

The crew then decked him out in a pair of striped trousers, an anchor-patterned shirt, a gaudily-designed handkerchief, and the gayest-looking jacket they could find, and the whole party then adjourned to a public-house, known as the 'Black Dog,' on The Rocks. A private room was engaged, with two fiddlers and a number of ladies of the pavement, and the seamen settled down to enjoy 'a night's proper spree,' carrying it on till an hour after sunrise. They spent the following nights in the same way, trying to prevail upon Rashleigh and the two djins to join them regularly. He, however, excused himself as often as he could do without offending the good-hearted fellows; while the djins resolutely refused to go again after the first night, when they had been scared by a fight which had occurred between two of the white women. 'No, Bealla,' said Enee, 'we not come. White men sometimes pretty quiet, but white women big devil-devil when they drink fire-water.' They were now living at Colonel Woodville's house, and were content with the comfort and pleasant strangeness of the unaccustomed mode of living.

Rashleigh had been in Sydney nearly a month before his host was well enough to see him. When he did send for him, Rashleigh was overcome by the warmth and sincerity of his gratitude for the rescue of his daughters and grandchild.

'Now, Bealla,' he concluded with tears in his eyes, 'if there is anything in this world that I can do for you, you

THE MEMOIRS OF

have only to name it. At the least, you will always have a home here, and I will see to it that neither you nor yours will ever want.'

Rashleigh, very much moved by the generosity of the old gentleman, glanced across at Mrs. Marby, and thought he saw her give an assenting nod to his unspoken inquiry as to whether he should now tell her father the truth about himself.

'I hope, Colonel Woodville,' he said, 'that for your daughters' sake you will forgive me for having attempted to deceive you, as it was Mrs. Marby who asked me to wait until you were well before telling you the truth about myself. I am a runaway convict, and was driven to escape because I could no longer endure the miseries of the lime-burners' camp on the Coal River. I can only say that my colonial record is clean, and has not been stained by any crime except that of escaping from servitude.'

Colonel Woodville listened to this brief confession with obvious amazement, and sat for some minutes looking silently at the floor. His eyes were full of pain and unhappiness as he raised them at last to look at Rashleigh.

'I never felt until now,' he said in a sad voice, 'how hard it can be to have to perform a duty. So long as I thought you to be the man you seemed to be, my home with all it contains were free to you, but now that you have declared yourself a fugitive criminal, there is only one course open to me. I am sorry.'

With a gesture of reluctance his hand went out to ring the bell to summon a servant, but Mrs. Marby, divining his intention, interposed.

'Oh, papa, what are you going to do?' she asked in a tone ringing with emotion.

'My duty, child; I must give the runaway up,' he

answered, his expression betraying the hardness of his duty.

'What,' said his daughter vehemently, 'will you give up the man who has saved our three lives, and who has trusted your generosity by telling you the truth, which would never have been known but for his own confession? You will hand this man back to the brutes who tortured him so terribly that he would rather risk death in escaping than endure it any longer? Fly, Rashleigh, fly while there is time! Go back to the bush, and live in safety, and try to forget the ingratitude of your own race. And call upon me if ever you need help. At least you shall find one white person whom you shall have no cause to remember as ungrateful.'

'No, lady,' said Rashleigh quietly, 'I do not blame the Colonel, for I know that he cannot do other than his duty. I can only hope, sir,' he went on, turning to Woodville, 'that, if you find that I have spoken the truth about my colonial career being free from crime, you will intercede to prevent me being sent back to Coal River.'

The old man had sunk back into his chair, with his face hidden in his hands; at the runaway's appeal he looked up.

'No one has ever before accused Hugh Woodville of ingratitude, and you, Lucy, know how you have wrung your father's heart by your hard words. No, listen to me,' he went on as Mrs. Marby made as if to speak. 'I will do all and more than Rashleigh asks. I will see that a strict investigation is made into his colonial history, and if I find that he is not all corrupt, I will exert all the influence I have to secure his freedom.'

'That is like my dear papa!' exclaimed Mrs. Marby, embracing him. 'And I am sure from his conduct towards two helpless women that he will merit all your kind interest.'

THE MEMOIRS OF

The Colonel then told Rashleigh that he would next morning wait upon the Chief Convict Officer and speak to him on Rashleigh's behalf: he to give himself up at the same time. He told his daughter that she should ask for an audience with the Governor for herself, her sister and son, and tell that gentleman the full story of their rescue by Rashleigh. At ten o'clock next morning Rashleigh went to Hyde Park Barracks, and a little later Colonel Woodville rode up on his horse. Rashleigh was summoned into the office of the Chief Convict Officer, with whom the Colonel was sitting. The official questioned him closely about the particulars of his servitude, and then ordered a clerk to bring the volume of convict records which contained Rashleigh's entry. As he opened the book, he turned again to the prisoner.

'What ship did you arrive by when you were transported?'

'The *Magnet*, sir,' answered Rashleigh.

The official turned the leaves of the book, muttering to himself the while: 'Ralph Rashleigh, per *Magnet* – hum! – yes, here he is: first offence, absconding and robbery, sentence death, respited: Newcastle, three years. Hum! how many times did you get punishment at Newcastle?'

'Nine times, sir.'

'Hum! A troublesome fellow, I'll be bound. How many robberies did you commit while you were in the bush?' demanded the official.

'Not one, sir,' answered the prisoner firmly.

'Oh, of course not!' remarked the official sarcastically. 'In that case, how did you live?'

Rashleigh then gave a true and frank account of his first meeting with Foxley, and made much the same defence of his position as he had done at the trial.

'A very pretty and well-got-up story,' the other observed. 'Now, sir, can you bring any tittle of evidence that you have spoken the truth?'

Rashleigh then told of all that had happened at the Shannavans', and how Mrs. McGuffin had successfully petitioned on his behalf.

Colonel Woodville, who had listened attentively to everything that had been said during the interview, took the Shannavans' address from Rashleigh, saying that he would visit them and discover whether they corroborated his story; and the officer engaged to write to Newcastle at once for particulars of the circumstances under which the prisoner had absconded. He then ordered Rashleigh to be strictly confined, but the Colonel interposed.

'He came to me of his own accord yesterday,' he said, 'and told me his story, which I believe to be true. I cannot think that he has any thought of running away again, and you would oblige me very much by treating him well until these inquiries are completed.'

The convict officer, who had treated the Colonel with very marked respect, agreed readily to oblige his superior, and Rashleigh was allowed to go among the other prisoners in the barrack-yard. Here he was at once christened Sambo, on account of his colour, and was subjected to so much annoyance in the way of tricks and practical jokes that he found it necessary to thrash three of the ringleaders before he could get any peace at all.

During the evening, Colonel Woodville's footman came to see him with a message from Mrs. Marby to the effect that the Governor had received them very kindly, but could promise them nothing until his colonial character had been established. She begged him to keep up his spirits, the footman said, and as an earnest that she did not for a

THE MEMOIRS OF

moment forget him, she sent an ample supply of money and the request that he would send to her for anything he might want. Rashleigh, having asked the man to convey his sincere thanks to his lady, said that he would be glad if she would send him some nitrous ether from the chemist's, with some other chemicals. These were sent to him without delay, and he set about trying to remove the black stain from his body.

The lotion with which he anointed himself was so strong that it caused the skin literally to peel off, and in the morning after the night of its application his convict companions were astounded to see him with the black outer skin hanging about him in strips: and they immediately dubbed him 'the piebald man.' It was a very painful process, but he was content to put up with the discomfort for the week which passed before it was completed, in return for the satisfaction of being able to appear in his natural colour once more. He found, on looking at himself in a mirror, that he looked quite youthful again, the effect of the black stain having been to age him by twenty years.

During the ten days which he spent at the barracks Mrs. Marby and her sister sent him daily messages of encouragement, and on the tenth day he saw Colonel Woodville ride into the grounds of the barracks. Almost immediately Rashleigh's name was called, and he was shown into the superintendent's office. The officer stared at him as he entered, and asked him who he was.

'Ralph Rashleigh, sir,' he answered.

Hearing his voice, the Colonel burst into laughter, saying: 'Good Lord, it is you! Somehow I expected to see you still black. I can hardly believe, even now, that you are the same man who saved my daughters.'

'You may thank Colonel Woodville all the days of your

life,' said the convict officer, using a milder tone than previously, 'and you ought to serve him faithfully, for it is only through his influence that you are not to be returned to Coal River to finish your sentence there. You are now assigned to him for the present.'

'Yes,' said the Colonel, 'that is the best I have been able to do for you at present. But I have a promise from the Governor that, if you behave yourself well for one year, he will recommend you to the Home Government for pardon.'

Rashleigh was too moved to do more than murmur a few words of thanks, which the Colonel brushed aside with an understanding gesture. 'That's no more than I owe you,' he said. 'It is I who owe *you* thanks. Will you now go up to the house, but wait until I come before you see my daughter. I wouldn't miss for anything seeing her surprise when she sees her black deliverer appear as a white man.'

On arriving at the house, the steward took him to a room by the Colonel's orders and gave him a respectable suit of clothes, and told him to remain where he was until he was sent for. At three o'clock in the afternoon he was brought to the drawing-room, where he found that the Colonel had staged his little comedy well. As he entered, Colonel Woodville turned to his two daughters and the boy.

'Ladies, permit me to introduce my new servant to you,' he said formally.

Mrs. Marby and the others looked at the stranger with mild interest, and as no one spoke the old gentleman turned to him.

'Have you no tongue, sir?' he asked with a smile. 'Pray, what is your name?'

'Ralph Rashleigh, *alias* Bealla,' answered the new servant, entering into the spirit of the Colonel's joke.

THE MEMOIRS OF

At the sound of his voice the little boy ran at once into his arms.

'Well, I suppose we ought not to be surprised to see you in your natural colour,' said Mrs. Marby; 'but I'm afraid I shall always think of our preserver as black, white though you are now. You are very welcome, black or white, and I know that you will prove to my father how right and well-founded is my good opinion of you.'

'I do not doubt it now, Lucy,' said her father, 'for I have heard another excellent account of his conduct in trying to save a poor girl from destruction, and I cannot believe that a man of such generous impulses can be corrupt at heart.'

'Well, well,' said Mrs. Marby, with a sigh of relief, 'let us hope that your troubles are over now. Rashleigh shall go as overseer on my farm at Hawkesbury, and his wages shall be half the profits from the land. Will that satisfy you?' she asked with a smile, turning to Rashleigh.

After stammering his thanks, Rashleigh withdrew and went to find Enee and Tita, and was surprised to find that they seemed quite unable to resume the old familiar relationship, now that he was a white man. They had certainly seen him as a white man at the very outset, but that, to them, was different. He attempted to speak to them, as usual, in their native tongue, but was then and always after repulsed by them by a demeanour of distant respect. They remained with him for years, but he never succeeded in breaking down the shy reserve which they maintained towards him. 'You white gentleman now: no more black fellow,' they would say, and go about their work.

Rashleigh took charge of the management of Mrs. Marby's farm at Hawkesbury until he received a conditional pardon for his services in rescuing her and her sister, and,

after a few years, was transferred to New England to manage a sheep farm which Captain Marby had purchased and stocked.

The sufferings which he had endured as a result of his crimes had long since destroyed his weak tendencies towards evil-doing, and he lived long enough to establish for himself a reputation as a man of scrupulous integrity in whom every one who knew him put utter trust. He died at a comparatively early age, in 1844, at the hands of the aborigines.

The squatters near Beardy Plains had long been troubled by the depredations of a tribe of hostile aborigines, and Rashleigh happened to be visiting a friend in that district when a messenger came with the news that the shepherd had been killed and the flock driven off by the blacks. Rashleigh and his friend at once mounted their horses and galloped off in pursuit. They came upon the camp of the marauders towards sunset, and saw the sheep penned in a rough stockyard made of boughs. The blacks made off at once on the appearance of the two horsemen, who immediately started with the flock towards home. They were passing a dense thicket when native war-yells startled them, and, before they could act, a great volley of spears were flung at them, and Rashleigh fell pierced by seven of them. As he toppled from his horse, he called to his friend to fly and save his life. His companion galloped off to the nearest station for help, but when the rescue party arrived Ralph Rashleigh was dead, his body having been terribly butchered by the bloodthirsty aborigines.

His body lies in a grave on the peaceful banks of the Barwen.

SUCH IS LIFE

Tom Collins

WHILE THE BILLY BOILS

87 stories from the Prose Works of
Henry Lawson

JOE WILSON'S MATES

56 stories from the Prose Works of
Henry Lawson

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN

Henry Kingsley

FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE

Marcus Clarke

ROBBERY UNDER ARMS

Rolf Boldrewood

BUSH BALLADS AND GALLOPING RHYMES

Poetical Works of Adam Lindsay Gordon

IN THE DAYS WHEN THE WORLD WAS WIDE

Poetical Works of Henry Lawson

**HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN BUSHRANGING
VOLUME 1**

Charles White

**HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN BUSHRANGING
VOLUME 2**

Charles White

LEAVES FROM AUSTRALIAN FORESTS

Poetical Works of Henry Kendall

The cover is taken from a painting
"The Artist with Aborigines near the mouth of the
Victoria River, Northern Territory"
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